



CONNECT - HOW DOES THIS TOPIC RELATE TO US?

Choose 1 or 2 questions to get your discussion started.

1. Share a time when you couldn't wait to speak with someone - perhaps a best friend, a sibling, a future spouse, or a parent. What were you feeling?
2. Share with the group your view of prayer. When and/or under what circumstances do you most often pray?
3. How would you currently describe the role of prayer in your life?
4. Christian philosopher Dallas Willard said, "The idea that everything would happen exactly as it does regardless of whether we pray or not is a specter that haunts the minds of many who sincerely profess belief in God. It makes prayer psychologically impossible, replacing it with dead ritual at best." Do you believe that prayer changes things? Why?

ENGAGE - WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH US?

Read the following passages in light of the idea of prayer being our primary connection with God.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
- Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

1. In both passages above, when are we commanded to pray?
2. Paul begins by stating we should "rejoice always," closely followed by the instruction to pray and give thanks. What is the relationship between rejoicing and prayer and thanksgiving?
3. To what extent do your prayers reflect both rejoicing in God and gratitude (thanksgiving) to God?
4. What does Paul describe as an outcome of praying in this manner, and how has that been true in your own experience?

For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more

than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen - Ephesians 3:14-21

1. What is the focus of Paul's prayer?
2. What does this reveal about his feelings toward the people in Ephesus? About his view of God?
3. How does this inform and/or challenge your own approach to prayer?

APPLY - HOW CAN THIS CHANGE OUR LIVES?

1. What role does prayer have in your relationship with God right now?
2. What adjustment in your current practice would help strengthen the connection that you have with God through prayer?
3. What are some of the benefits of setting a specific time and place for prayer?
 - If you have a time and place set aside for prayer, tell your group how this has helped your prayer life.
 - If you have not established a specific place and time for prayer, but want to, tell your group members where and when you plan to pray.

ACTION STEP - CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING TO DO THIS NEXT WEEK:

- At least once, review your prayer after you are done. (See Going Deeper section for A Review of Prayer.) Use your insights to help you improve your prayer practice.
- Pray a different Psalm each day. If you do not feel like the Psalm is relevant to where you are in life, pray it on behalf of someone else. For example, if you read a lament Psalm but do not feel like that connects with you right now, think of someone who is going through a hard time and pray it on their behalf.
- Identify and implement a step that would help you look forward to speaking with God throughout the day ("pray without ceasing").

PRAYER - CLOSE YOUR GROUP TIME BY PRAYING PSALM 23 ALOUD TOGETHER

GOING DEEPER - FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

A Review of Prayer (from *The Life You Always Wanted* by John Ortberg)

Sometimes people fail to learn more about prayer because they don't reflect on what actually happens when they pray. This is an exercise to help us learn to pray. Think of this as what we might do after a visit with a good friend. We spent a few moments alone and think about our time together. We recall moments when we felt especially close, or perhaps moments when there was conflict or confusion. We remember saying something that feels unfinished or needs to be resolved. We are grateful for the time we were able to spend with that friend.

Here is how you might review your prayer:

- Take three or four minutes after you have finished praying to reflect on the prayer. This is not part of the prayer, but a separate exercise.
- How did the prayer get started? Were you aware of God's presence, or was there a sense that you were simply thinking by yourself?

- Did any parts of the prayer seem especially “alive” as you prayed? Did you have times of strong convictions or emptiness, and if so, what were they? Did they seem to be moving you closer to God, or farther away?
- What difficulties did you encounter? Did you feel tired or bored or experience other barriers? Did you find your mind wandering, and if so, to what? What were you praying over when this happened? How did you respond?
- Did you have any sense of being called to respond or carry out some action? If so, what was it?
- What was the general “tone” of your prayer: Warm and loving? Difficult or painful? Dark? Reassuring? Sobering? Foggy?

Write down the results of this review, as that can help you learn from your prayers over time.

Recommended Resources **A.** Read the book *Letters by a Modern Mystic* by missionary Frank Laubach. It is a short book that describes one Jesus-follower’s attempt to live in a moment-by-moment relationship with God. **B.** Read the article *7 Reasons You Should Pray the Psalms* by The Gospel Coalition (available online if you search the title) **C.** For more structure in your prayer life, find a daily devotional that includes both regular scripture reading and a prayer prompt. There are thousands available both in hard copy and online. One suggestion is *Daily Office* by Peter Scanzero.