

Guiding a Short Prayer Time with a Small Group

Bible Study & Home Group Prayer

Make prayer a priority; don't let any lesser thing take its place.

For the purpose of this discussion, prayer *time*, as opposed to prayer *meeting*, refers to a time set aside for group prayer during a meeting that has some other primary purpose: most commonly at the beginning or end of a Bible study class. In many churches, these are the most consistent and effective prayer times, so make the most of them. This chapter will also apply to many small church mid-week services.

Making Prayer a Priority:

In a setting where time is limited, making prayer a priority is the first issue your group must settle. Have you ever conducted a profile of how your group uses its time? If not, try this;

- Ask a class member to come to class ten minutes early with a pen, notepad, and digital watch on which the seconds are easily seen.
- Have them start taking notes as people arrive. They are to make note of the beginning of every event.

- In the left margin, they are to note the exact time.

Such a profile might look like this:

09:55:03	Class members start to arrive.
10:00:00	Time for class to start, people still coming in, everybody visiting.
10:13:46	Class president calls class to order and asks for announcements or class business. etc., etc., etc.
10:22:05	President turns the class over to teacher.
10:22:08	Teacher asks for prayer requests. etc., etc., etc.
10:25:49	Teacher begins prayer. Several people pray.
10:27:32	Teacher concludes prayer.
10:27:45	Teacher asks everyone to open Bibles.

- 10:28:08 Teacher asks a class member to read the first scripture.
- 10:32:11 Teacher asks a discussion question and several offer their opinions.
- 10:36:26 Teacher asks another class member to read the next Bible verse.
- 10:37:03 Teacher gives background of verse.
- 10:42:49 Class member asks question and several offer opinions.
- 10:45:13 Teacher asks class member to read the next scripture.
- 10:45:35 Teacher explains the verse.
- 10:52:23 Teacher apologizes for not finishing the lesson and asks everyone to stand for the closing prayer.
- 10:52:30 Teacher asks a class member to lead the closing prayer.
- 10:52:51 End of prayer. Class dismissed.

From this profile we can determine how the class above is using its time:

- just over nineteen minutes visiting (including the early arrivals),
- eighteen minutes reading scripture and teaching,
- eight minutes with announcements and class business,
- six and a half minutes in discussion about the lesson,
- almost four minutes making prayer requests, and
- two minutes in prayer.

Prayer will typically account for the least amount of time. Most of us agree that prayer should be a priority, but other things just crowd it out.

Now, how can you make your small group an exception to the rule? How can you make

prayer a priority? The solution's the same as it is for every other important thing in your life:

- Set your priorities.
- Create a plan based on your priorities.
- Educate everyone involved in the plan.
- Carry out the plan.
- Adjust the plan as needed.
- Re-educate as needed.
- Keep working the plan.

If you don't know how much of your group's time should be dedicated to prayer, start by doing a time profile of your class, then calculate how much time was spent doing the following:

	Fellowship
	Announcements and class business
	Prayer requests
	Prayer
	Teaching
	Discussion of Bible lesson by class members

Discuss the results with your group and make a realistic schedule that gives prayer its appropriate priority. Such a schedule might look like this:

Our Bible Study Class
Class time: 10:00 – 10:50

10:00	fellowship time
10:05	class business
10:10	prayer time
10:20	teaching the Word
10:50	dismiss

Once the schedule is agreed upon, post it in the room for all to see. Of course, that will do no

good unless the leaders of the class are committed to it. For instance, when it's 10:10 and the class is still discussing business, the leader of the class should say, "Our time's up for business and we don't want to use up our prayer time, so we'll have to continue this discussion later."

That's how you make prayer a priority; schedule it and don't let any lesser thing take its place. Now that you've made prayer a priority, you need to prepare well for the time your group has dedicated to prayer.

Preparation:

If you haven't studied the section on preparation in chapter 5, please do so now. Most prayer leaders are not accustomed to preparing for prayer the way they do for devotionals and other public speaking responsibilities. Some even feel that group prayer should be completely spontaneous with no preparation at all.

Guiding prayer effectively requires preparation and usually some notes to use during the prayer time. If that makes you uncomfortable, take a look at the 980 word prayer King Solomon prayed when he dedicated the temple in 2 Chronicles 6.

The prayer is not only beautiful; it's prophetic because he prays for the nation in captivity. Think about that. He's praying at the very zenith of Israel's power and prosperity, yet he prays about a time in which the people would be slaves in a foreign country. That didn't happen until hundreds of years later. I'd say he'd spent some time with the Lord preparing for this prayer.

If you want to lead group prayer more effectively than what you've experienced in the past, preparation is a must and for most of us, that will include using some notes.

Solomon was a really smart guy and probably didn't use notes, but for me, any time I'm doing something complicated and/or important, I use notes. I bet you do too. Why? Because notes give you confidence even if you don't have to use them.

Having said all that, don't get in over your head by planning a prayer time you can't handle. If you've never used the techniques described in Part 3, don't try to use them all. Start with what you're most comfortable with.

Also, if your time is limited to four or five minutes, you won't be able to use all the techniques. The following suggestions include all of them and assume you have ample time. Pick and choose what's appropriate for your situation.

Before the meeting checklist:

- Talk to the Lord about your group's prayer life during your daily devotional time.
- Find a notepad and pen that you can handle easily with your Bible during the prayer time.
- Locate a scripture to use for meditation (chapter 13) and mark it in your Bible. This could be a verse from the passage the group will be studying.
- Write down a Biblical situation to use at the beginning of the prayer time for visualization.. (chapter 14) Practice painting this word picture by seeing it in your mind, then describing it out loud as vividly as you can.
- Write down needs you anticipate the group will bring up as prayer requests. In some situations it's helpful to provide this list to the group.
- Introduce topical prayer (chapter 12) to several people ahead of time if it will be new to this group.

When it's time to pray:

- Explain that you're going to lead the session a little differently. Explain briefly the principles of topical prayer.
- Have prayer requests as you feel led. Don't let this eat up the time. See chapter 15 for help.
- Ask them to bow their heads and think about the scripture you're going to read. Read the scripture you selected previously. If it's brief, read it two or three times.
- Ask them to see themselves in the Biblical situation you selected earlier. Describe it briefly but vividly.

Salutation:

- Begin the prayer with the salutation of your choice.(chapter 5)
- Give your personal praise and thanksgiving. Be brief.
- Guide the group in a time of silent praise and thanksgiving using prayer by suggestion (chapter 11). Make a suggestion, pray the prayer silently, and then make the next suggestion. It could go like this, "As you begin your conversation with the Heavenly Father, why don't you thank Him for your family... thank Him for what He's done for you today... praise Him for the beauty of this day... etc." After three or four of these suggestions they'll have the idea and you should be silent for ten or fifteen seconds as they continue their silent praise.

Petition:

- Have a time of repentance early in the prayer time. Continuing to use prayer by suggestion, remind them that sin is a

hindrance to prayer. Suggest that they talk to the Lord about any sin in their life. If you're already 'prayed-up' for the day, be careful you don't rush them. This will be the main issue for some of your group.

- Open the session to individual prayers when you feel that the group's ready. Say something like this, "As we continue in prayer, I would like for you to pray out loud, one at a time, as you feel led. As you pray, please pray briefly for one issue at a time. This will give others the opportunity to join their prayer with yours. We will continue to pray about that one request until someone introduces a different need. I'll begin."
- Make the suggestion that someone lead the group to a new topic if you hear a prayer that's repetitious of a previous prayer. Usually two or three prayers on one topic are enough. After that, the prayers will tend to repeat or folks will fall back into the old habit of long monologue prayers. When the group's first learning to pray topically, you may need to do this often.
- Glance at your list of requests when you feel that the prayer time is coming to a conclusion or time's running out. Use prayer by suggestion to guide the group to pray for the remaining requests.
- Let the group know that you're about to conclude the session by asking if anyone still has a burden that they need to pray about.

Benediction:

- Thank the Lord for His presence and attention to the requests that have been made.
- Conclude with the benediction of your choice. (chapter 5)

STUDY GUIDE:

1. To make prayer a priority; _____ it and don't let any _____ thing take its place.
2. When doing something complicated and/or important, it's good to use _____, because they give you _____.
3. After the group has begun praying out loud, it's OK to interrupt and give instructions when needed. True or False

Discussion question: Explain the difference in a prayer *time* and a prayer *meeting*.