

# Sermon Discussion Guide

## A Beginner's Guide to Prayer Preparing for 40 Days of Prayer – Week 2

(Note – may only be reproduced for use as a participant in MCF's 40 Day of Prayer campaign)

*"You have not because you do not ask God."* James 4:2

There are many facets to prayer causing people to feel awkward, unsatisfied, frustrated and/or confused when they pray. We all need help to learn how to pray – even the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray because they understood that's where his power came from. Most frustrations are caused by our misconceptions: prayer is not a magic wand; it is not an act of desperation; it is not a tug of war with God nor is it a ritual to relieve guilt. There are four foundational truths about prayer. Let's find out what they are by talking it over.

**OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH A PRAYER. THIS IS ONLY A GUIDE – SELECT THE POINTS YOU WANT TO DISCUSS.**

*"We can be confident in approaching God, knowing that he listens to us whenever we ask him for anything according to his will. And since we know that he hears us when we make our requests, then we can be sure that he will answer us."* 1 John 5:14-15

1. Since God promises us that he listens to us whenever we ask him for anything, according to his will, what steps should we take to practice prayer, so it becomes a habit? What misconceptions do we need to discard in order to make our prayers with God more conversational than ritual?

*"Let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith . . ."* Hebrews 10:22 (TEV)

2. What condition of the heart does God expect from us when we pray? Describe the characteristics of a humble heart. How do you prepare yourself to come to God in prayer?

*"Call to me and I will answer you. I will show you marvelous and wondrous things that you could never figure out on your own."* Jeremiah 33:3 (Message)

3. Ask each group member to list some situations where God revealed marvelous and wondrous things in their lives. Then ask: What was your response? How was your faith been impacted? How does knowing God will answer you in prayer increase your desire to talk frequently to him? How long do you wait in silence to hear God's reply?

*"The Lord waits for you to come to him so he can show you his love and compassion."* Isaiah 30:18 (NLT)

4. Knowing prayer means you are speaking to a heavenly Father waiting for you to communicate with him, how might your prayers change? Name some situations which might cause a person to turn to God in prayer, then list some which might cause someone to turn away from prayer. How does knowing God wants to show his love and compassion alter these polar opposite feelings?

### **Diving Deeper (optional)**

1. The theme of the 40 Days of Prayer is James 4:2: *You have not because you do not ask God.* Sit quietly and imagine Jesus speaking these words to you. What would you say in response? What emotions do you think this interaction would evoke in you? What insights might you gain about God?
2. How often do you pray to God? How do you feel prayer changes you? Has it changed you enough that others have noticed and are curious about God? Why or why not?

**REVIEW ANY ASSIGNMENTS OR COMMITMENTS MADE DURING YOUR PREVIOUS MEETING.**

## Sermon Discussion Guide Leader Notes

### Suggestions for This Week's Study

- What prayer are you glad God didn't answer?
- Goal: To learn the 4 Foundational Truths of Prayer
- *Jesus, our Lord, your love for us is beyond words. Thank you for giving us the ability to pray – to communicate with you. Show us all that you long for our hearts to be deeply connected to you. Open our eyes more and more to your presence; that you would draw us closer to you with our every breath. Please fill us with the courage to approach you and talk to you about anything. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.*

### Preparing to Lead Your Group

- ✓ **PRAY** for insight as you begin to prepare for leading your group. Ask for God's wisdom, that the Holy Spirit will be the teacher and that you will be God's instrument to lead the group to greater understanding and a willingness to commit to becoming more like God. Prayer should be your primary source of personal preparation for leading your group.
- ✓ **PLAN** where you want to take your group in the next 60-90 days. Is your group strong in some areas and weak in others? How can you challenge the members to live more balanced Christian lives? Consider God's five purposes for the church: Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, Mission and Worship, and make a plan to encourage your group members to growth and commitment in their weak areas.
- ✓ **PONDER YOUR PROGRESS** after each session and at the end of a series. Reflect on what went well and what didn't. Re-evaluation is key to your growth as a leader. Consider whether your plan is being effective in moving the group to greater understanding and commitment. How are you doing with leading the discussion: is it stimulating, challenging, and meaningful? Are you able to keep the group on track? Do you need to make some changes?

### Using This Sermon Discussion Guide

- Talk It Over is a tool to aid you in meeting the needs of your group. We've designed it so it can be completed easily within 30-45 minutes. As the discussion leader, you should preview and evaluate the questions based on the needs of your group. Decide in advance what is most important to focus on, should time not allow for the entire lesson.
- Feel free to adapt the format to meet the needs of your group. If your group is mature and wants to dig deeper, consider using the Diving Deeper section or add additional Scripture and ask suitable questions. Remember that this is only a guide.
- The questions relating to Bible study methods are helpful to develop Bible literacy and spiritual maturity in our lives. You can help your group be aware of their needs in these areas by using these questions as a regular part of each discussion.
- Personal applications are essential for growth and should be included in every discussion. When discussing how they will apply principles, group members may state very general goals such as "I need to spend more time in prayer." It is important for you to help people make goals that are very specific and commit to specific plans of action by asking, for example, "How are you going to begin?" An example is to get up 25 minutes earlier each morning, spending 15 minutes reading the Bible and 10 minutes in prayer. Encourage each group member to be accountable to the group for personal progress at the next meeting.
- Your goal as the leader is to bring the group into a stimulating discussion that helps the members recognize their needs for personal life change. Ultimately you want them to be willing to commit to change with accountability to the group. Accountability helps us to persevere in our commitments and achieve the blessings of success.