

PRAY

Living Faith in Daily Life

A small group study on prayer

Prayer is a mark of discipleship; the first of the seven disciplines highlighted in the ELCA-wide *Call to Discipleship*:

Prayer is the way a disciple enjoys an intimate relationship with God. Prayer can be private or public, ritualized or conversational, silent or out loud, spoken or sung, words or action, simple or profound. Through prayer God's will is discerned and greater clarity is gained for our journey. Prayer is powerful. God's creative, redeeming and healing power is often directed through prayer. . .

Prayer is Adoration (praise, honoring God), Confession (saying "I'm sorry," acknowledging sin, that "I can't do it on my own"), Thanksgiving (saying thanks, counting blessings, allowing God's perspective to shape life) and Supplication (asking for, praying for others, petitionary in character) - ACTS. The Lord's Prayer and Luther's interpretation in the Small Catechism provide ample instruction for the content and elements of prayer and a prayerful life. Part of a disciple's job description is to pray frequently. (Excerpt from "Faith Practices: Assessing Their Place in Your Life," Living Faith Congregation Guide, 2000).

When it comes to a study on prayer, there is always a need to be attentive to both the individual's personal prayer life and the prayer life of the local congregation. We are all called to develop our relationship with God through prayer, study, worship, etc. We are also called to be an active part of the community of faith, the body of Christ and his Church.

Despite the simplicity of the discipline of prayer, many of us find it confusing or difficult to pray. Even if we do pray regularly, we still have many questions about it. This four-session study has been designed to engage a group in the practice of prayer and to raise questions with the intention of gaining a better understanding about prayer. Participants will grow in their confidence in prayer through study of select Bible references, by exploring personal preferred styles of praying, through journaling, and by experiencing varied prayer opportunities.

How to use this study

This study has been designed for a small group of 5 to 12 people eager to grow in their life of prayer. Although shared leadership can be an excellent gift to advance confidence and skill within the group, a single leader can also serve the group well. Instructions for the leader are found in boxes throughout this resource. The space for the study should include a small prayer focal point; for example, a small table to hold a candle, an icon or picture of Jesus, and/or a hand-sized cross or crucifix. The goal is to create an open atmosphere where each person can share fears, questions, and insights regarding prayer. Time for praying together is important to widen the experience and confidence in praying. Each session is divided into three sections:

Gathering A time to transition from all other activities of the day to begin focusing on the reason for gathering. Introductory questions and prayer assist in building the group's identity and cohesiveness. Allow time for laughter and genuine community building.

Growing A time to reflect on the Bible, stories and personal journaling time.

Going A time to consider how the discipline of daily prayer will be lived out in the coming week. These closing prayer activities are important to widen the experience of prayer.

Suggested time for each session is 60-90 minutes.

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Session 1

‘Ask, and it will be given to you’

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the study begins. Encourage each in turn to respond to the following discussion starters. You might start with your own sharing.

1. Recall a time when you asked for something and did not receive it. Allow your memory to sail. Think about a humorous or sad memory. Share your name and briefly describe your memory of an unanswered request.
2. In a few sentences, share a story of a time when you were unable to meet someone else's request of you. How did that feel for you?



Advance preparation

To facilitate a successful small group experience, attend to the following needs in advance of the first session:

- Order a copy of this study, *Pray: Living Faith in Daily Life*, for each participant. (ISBN:6-0001-6440-8, \$1.25 each, plus shipping and handling.)
- Provide a small notebook for the personal reflection and journal exercises. Remember extra pencils, pens and Bibles.
- The facilitator should review this study in advance of the group's gathering to determine which resources to have on hand for each session.
- Plan for refreshments.

Let's Pray

Pray, or ask a volunteer to pray the following prayer aloud or speak another prayer of your choosing inviting petitions from participants.

Gracious and loving God, your Word teaches us how much you desire to give wonderful gifts to us, your children. We pause now to thank you for the many gifts you have given to us in our life. *(Pause for 30 seconds or so)* We are also mindful of times where it felt as if you did not hear our request, as it seemed to go unanswered. Like the 12 disciples in the Gospels, we say, "Lord, teach us to pray." In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read the following aloud. You might read this material ahead of time and simply share it with the group.

"I was tired from several long days of teaching on the road. As I slid into my seat on the airplane, I felt waves of exhaustion wash over me. I yearned for peace and quiet - no more listening to others and no more talking, just quiet. As we sat and waited for the last passengers to board, I noticed that the only seat left was the middle seat next me. The air conditioning on the plane was not working and it was extremely hot sitting there. I prayed, 'God, please let this seat remain empty!' Just as they were closing the doors, in he bounced like Tigger, full of energy. 'God, why didn't you answer me?' I grumbled my prayer! No matter how I tried to ignore him, he kept trying to initiate conversation with me. Finally, I gave up all hope of sleeping and listened to this young twenty-something. By the time we deplaned, I knew why God had not honored my prayer. This 90-minute plane ride had enabled me to witness boldly to my faith in Jesus and to encourage this man to reconcile with his dying

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father to whom he was returning home to visit for the first time in three years.”

We do not always see the positive results from a prayer that is answered in a strikingly different way, as in this story. Sometimes we are left holding the frustrations and questions when prayer appears to be unanswered. Part of the growing edge in prayer is being ready to step back from the situation and see different answers to our prayer. We see our situation through a “foggy mirror” (1 Corinthians 13:12) but God sees the whole picture with clarity. Whose perspective would you rather trust with the decision on how to answer a prayer?

As a group, discuss this question and any thoughts or personal stories triggered by the airplane story.

BIBLE FOCUS: *Matthew 7:7-8*

Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given you. . . For everyone who asks receives. . .”

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the Scripture text and the following aloud. You might read this material ahead of time and simply share it with the group. Discuss questions and reactions as they arise.

Conversation around this and similar verses about asking and receiving often triggers memories and feelings. Raise your hand if you have prayed and received an answer to that prayer. Also, raise your hand if you have prayed and felt as if that prayer is still unanswered. If we are honest, most of us will find that we raised our hands to both questions.

The words of Jesus we have just read have caused much misunderstanding about prayer. Sometimes they are misused as a formula that seems to tell us that we can get what we want through prayer (like a letter to Santa Claus). When a me-centered, attitude draws us away from a loving relationship with God, we have distorted prayer into something it was not meant to be. Often we try to manipulate God to give us our hearts’ desire. Prayer is first of all a two-way communication between God and “me.” Part of that communication includes the use of words. Other

parts of it may include images, visions, dreams and other forms of revelation. At its deepest point, this communication may also take the shape of meditation or contemplation—wordless and image-less worship, communion with God.

Explore the meaning of this verse and other verses on prayer:

(asking and receiving: Luke 11)

(if two agree: Matthew 18:1)

(ask with faith: Matthew 21:22 and Mark 11:24)

The Gospel of John adds the understanding that our asking and receiving has to do with our relationship with God. If we abide or live by faith in Jesus and his Word lives in us, we will be living out his will as we live in this loving relationship (John 14:13-15; 15:7, 16; 16:23-24). When we consider that the encouragement to ask flows out of our loving relationship with God, it changes what we desire and ask to receive.

An example to illustrate this point is two close friends whose relationship is strong and healthy. Because of the friendship, both of those involved will tend to think about what is best for **us** rather than **me**. As a result, decisions and experiences flow out of the loving nature of the relationship. Conversations are seasoned by love, respect, and the desire to know and understand each other better. This is the nature of prayer as well. It is loving communication that is eager to receive God’s answers rather than push for our own. Meditation on God is like a woman who daydreams about her fiancé while they are apart.

Discuss the following questions. Ask participants to enter reflections and thoughts in their journals and share responses if they are willing to do so.

1. Read Matthew 7:9-10. “Earthly parents know how to give good gifts to their children. They do not give a stone instead of a loaf or a serpent instead of a fish.” These terms may have been chosen in part because of the superficial resemblance between some flat round stones and ordinary Palestinian loaves, between some serpents and some fish.” What is the best gift that you have ever received from anyone? What is the best thing that God has ever given you?

2. As you further reflect on gift giving, why do you give gifts to those you care about? What do you consider in selecting a gift? How does it feel to watch that person open that gift?

3. Imagine that you are God. What might be some factors that enter into your decision making as you consider various prayer requests?

JOURNAL TIME

Journal work may be started during class time and completed later at home. It may be helpful to share some of your journal reflections.

Read John 15:1-17. Circle the 10 times that John uses the word “abide” in verses 1-11. Reflect in your journal on the word abide. What comes to mind? Write down your thoughts, sketch the picture, or write the poem or song that begins to unfold. Some of us may have an existing hymn, painting or devotional article that comes to mind. Find it, write the name of the hymn or devotional title and page down in your journal and add your own reflections on it as well. Other words from John 15 to journal on are: love, joy, bearing fruit, and finally, ask (v. 7, 16). What are the relationships that you see in this text between these relational words and the encouragement to ask?

Going Final thoughts

Read the following aloud and discuss, as time permits.

You are invited in this study to seize this moment and wade into the life-giving waters of prayer. Admittedly, prayer develops spiritual intuition and faith within us that we may not ever have experienced. Meditating on Bible passages, deep reflection and journaling about God and life, as well as expressing our heart-felt concerns and requests to God, may all be new to you. That is all part of the gift and adventure of prayer. Pastoral guidance and the support and

encouragement of Christians journeying with us are as valuable as having a map and a compass on any other journey. Let the joy of this spiritual journey begin! Jump into the waters of prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

If possible, light a candle and soften the lights in the room. Designate one person to briefly open and close the prayer time. Invite others to name in prayer a hindrance that holds them back from abiding in Jesus. Some may choose to pray a word of joy or thanksgiving for the gift of a relationship with God and each other in the small group. Ask someone to slowly and quietly read again John 15:1-17. Take time for silence and meditation before closing the prayer.

Encourage all to complete the Small Group Covenant. Suggest that participants read the covenant and sign it prayerfully. The covenant is meant to be a statement of intention, seeking God's blessing.

Small Group Covenant:

1. I commit to being a part of this group for each of our meetings (barring emergencies).
2. I will pray each day for each small group member by name.
3. I will invest time each day to pray, reflect and journal on the “journal time” text.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Session 2

Search and you will find'

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Take time to allow those who are willing, to share some of their prayer or journaling experiences since the last session. Encourage each person to answer the following questions. You might start with your own sharing.

1. Were there any new insights that came to you as you prayed and journaled this week?
2. How did you do in keeping your covenant?
3. Are there any changes that you want to make this week to improve your prayer time?

Let's Pray

Pray, or ask a volunteer to pray the following prayer aloud or speak another prayer of your choosing.

Loving Lord, thank you for each person present at this moment. Thank you for your presence with us throughout this week. Be present now in our small group time together. Open our minds and hearts to learn from you through one another. Draw us closer into your presence and teach us how to pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read the following aloud. You might read this material ahead of time and simply share it with the group. Discuss your impressions and reactions to the story.

"My name is Rick, I am 36 years old, single, and living alone in my apartment. My two part-time jobs and food stamps help me to make it in this world. A few good friends and my church family care about me. Mean people have made fun of me all my life because I have trouble reading and it takes me a little longer to catch onto things. This has often left me feeling hurt and lonely. I met a pastor who taught about prayer. I told her that my prayer has always been to meet my

real family because I have been raised by foster families with many foster children over time. What's funny is that after we prayed together about my desire to meet my family—about nine months later—the pastor told me that she had met a man who discovered with her that he was my uncle. When I met him, he gave me some photographs and a phone number of one of my sisters (it turned out that I have three sisters)! I was so nervous calling her that first time. After several phone calls and letters, she invited me to visit her for Christmas. My best Christmas ever was the answer to my prayer, as I sat in my sister's apartment with all three of my sisters there."

BIBLE FOCUS: Matthew 7:7-8

"Search and you will find... everyone who searches finds."

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the Scripture text and the following aloud. You might read this material ahead of time and simply share it with the group. Discuss questions or reactions as they arise.

In session one, we discussed how the good gifts (answers to prayer) God wants to give, come out of the loving relationship that God desires for each of us. Prayer flows out of our relationship with God and out of our heart for other people. As the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) summarizes the focus for evangelism, the Great Commandment (Luke 10:27) summarizes the focus for prayer: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart; and with all your soul; and with all your strength; and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

The more we seek and search out God, the more we discover that prayer is about relationships and less about spoken words crafted into some prayer formula. The key word that we will be discussing today is love.

Discuss the following questions. Encourage participants to make notes in their journals.

1. Who stands out for you as a model of one who has lived or is living a life that reflects the Great Commandment? What do you see in his or her life that demonstrates love toward God and others?
 2. Read John 3:16-17. What discoveries emerge regarding God's desire for relationship with people?
 3. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). What does this text say about the decision that was made by Jesus for us? What new insights can you gain from the reading and reflection?
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End your discussion with this exercise.

Slowly, read together the Great Commandment quoted above. Focusing our love on God with our whole being is a challenge. Eliminate possible distractions as you prepare to express your love to God with your whole self. Repeating a Bible passage like John 15:13 over and over can help to focus you. God loves you and desires that you seek God's heart, God's presence. Allow time to silently seek the heart of God.

JOURNAL TIME

Journal work may be started during class time and completed later at home. It may be helpful to share some of your journal reflections.

One of the challenges to prayer may be some misconceptions about God that you have learned. We may need "inner healing" offered by a spiritual director or pastor if we see God as angry with us, or if we think that God offers conditional love based on how good we are. Take time to reflect and record in your journal your thoughts on this Bible passage: "But strive (seek) first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things (your daily needs like food, drink and clothing) will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33). What comes to mind as you pray about this passage? How will you implement these thoughts this week?

Going

Read the following aloud and share your reactions.

Rick's quest to get connected with his biological family had been underway for over ten years. We rarely understand why some prayers are answered, especially the time line involved. In actuality, Rick had pretty much given up hope of ever meeting his family at the point when this pastor asked him about his prayer request. There are no magic formula's because prayer is about relationships. What is certain is that God both loves us and listens to our prayers.

CLOSING PRAYER

Light a candle and pray this prayer. All may offer petitions aloud if they wish.

Loving God, you continue to seek us out, offering us another opportunity to enter into a relationship with you. We praise you for your loving and caring nature. We thank you for Jesus, who offered his life for us, to open the door to you. Your forgiveness truly sets us free! Empower our witness to you and our service for you this week. Draw us to you once again. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
—1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Session 3

'Knock and the door will be opened for you'

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

As the group gathers, invite each person to pair up with another person whom they do not know well. Ask one person to share a prayer concern for him/herself. The other person prays for that request. Have them switch roles. This exercise provides an opportunity to get to know others better and to build confidence in praying for others. Discuss the following questions.

1. How did it feel for you to have someone listening to you and offering prayer for your request?
2. How was your experience in praying out loud for someone else? In what way did you feel your prayer reflected the concern of the other person?
3. What ideas come to mind that might make opportunities to offer prayer for others in our congregation? What steps would we need to take to offer this ministry?

Let's Pray

Pray this prayer or speak your own prayers aloud.

O God, your Holy Spirit has knocked at the door of our lives at various points in our journey through life. Thank you for your faithfulness and persistence in seeking us out. Your forgiving grace renews us each day. Come into our midst now as we gather. Fill this time with your loving presence. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Growing

The setting is a debate class. Each person is to select a topic and present a 60 second argument.

1. "Why bother praying when God knows every thing?"
2. "I pray because I need to pray."
3. "Jesus said that we are to pray...so we pray out of obedience."
4. "I've prayed and nothing happened."
5. "God's going to do what God's going to do, no matter what I pray."
6. "God answers prayer."
7. "Prayer is for the weak and lazy."
8. "We must pray in faith and God will answer."
9. "Prayer is simply talking to yourself."
10. "At certain points in my life, prayer is the only thing that sustains me."

After your arguments, discuss the following questions:

- How easy was it for you to speak convincingly about your topic?
- Have you or others you know used this argument before?
- How can we give a positive witness for prayer in the face of negative experiences?

BIBLE FOCUS: Matthew 7:7-8

Jesus said, "Knock, and the door will be opened to you...for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."

Read, or ask a volunteer to read the Scripture text and the following aloud. You might read this material ahead of time and simply share it with the group. Discuss questions and reactions as they arise.

It is interesting that of the three words, ask, search and knock, it is this third word that has been captured in the famous picture of Jesus' standing at the door knocking. Although this word appears only four times in the Old Testament and nine times in the New

Testament, it is this final appearance in Revelation 3:20 that is popularized in that picture of Jesus.

Read Revelation 3:14-22. This is the seventh and final church being addressed in chapters two and three of Revelation. Like each church before it, this word is addressed to the “angel” of that congregation (3:14). Another repeated pattern in these addresses is that those who have ears to hear are to listen (3:22). Other than these patterns, each church has a unique situation, and even the unhealthiest church is offered an opportunity to change. In this particular word to the angel of the church of Laodicea, the criticism is that they are lukewarm, not hot or cold (3:15-19). The word of hope is held in 3:20.

Discuss the following questions.

1. Why do you think that each word was directed to the “angel” of that particular congregation? Does your congregation have an angel? What might that angel have to do with the spirit or nature of your congregation?
2. The Gospels record Jesus' using the similar saying about “having ears to hear.” What is the distinction between the words, listen and hear?
3. Share times when you have prayed and saw a door that was closed or open. What was the door like? What did the experience mean to you and your prayer life?

Journal Time

Journal work may be started during class time and completed later at home. It may be helpful to share some of your journal reflections.

Take a few minutes to reflect on Revelation 3:20 in your journal. How do you hear the voice of God in your life? You may hear God in a number of ways. Ways that people have heard the Lord include thoughts, dreams, visions, audibly, through other people, the Bible or sermons. If you are saying to yourself, “I’ve never heard God,” consider those coinci-

dences in your life when you broke out of your schedule and called or visited someone who needed you at that very moment. Why did you do that? Was it odd or was it God? What might God be saying to you as you prayerfully reflect on this verse? Read it three times and then sit quietly with it. What bubbles up into your mind? Write your thoughts in your journal.

Going

Read the following aloud. Discuss the questions or other questions and insights.

Let’s think about doors. They can be open, closed, locked or ajar. Jesus referred to himself as the door (KJV) or gate (NRSV) in John 10:7. In this metaphor, Jesus speaks of himself as the door that protects you from harm. The missionary Paul wrote using the imagery of a door to represent new opportunities for ministry: “When I came to Troas to proclaim the good news of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord...” (2 Corinthians 2:12). Read aloud these passages of Scripture:

Acts 14:27

Colossians 4:2-4

1 Corinthians 16:8-9

Revelation 3:7-8

What doors are closed for you that our Lord may want opened? What doors in your congregation hang open that may need to be closed at this time? What doors may God want you to open? How about in your community?

For the closing prayer time, light the candle, soften the lights. Ask participants to sit comfortably and image the picture of Jesus knocking on the door. Ask “What comes to mind? You, your church, your neighborhood, someone who you know who does not believe and worship Jesus, or your community? Pray about this door right now and this week.”

After 10 to 15 minutes, close in a shared prayer time. Ask for a volunteer to open with prayer. Invite everyone to participate in praying about opening doors into the community. Seek another volunteer to close the prayer time.

Session 4

'Act in accord with your prayers'

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Talk about these questions as you gather.

1. Share any insights gained this week as you prayed about the Revelation 3:20 image of Jesus standing and knocking at the door.
2. Because a doorway marks a passage from one place to another, explore together the picture of your church's front door being a portal of prayer where people pass from the community into the presence of God. What are your thoughts?
3. If each one of us as a Christian represents Christ wherever we are in the world, can you imagine a portal of prayer as you look at a stranger and pray them into God's presence? Visualize flooding that person with the light of Christ. Could that idea work for you as you go about your day? If not, what might work for you?

LET'S PRAY

Pray this prayer or speak your own petitions.

We give you thanks, gracious Lord, for the gift of life. As we gather for this last session, open the doors of our hearts and minds to hear and do what you are calling us to be and do. You are the solid rock upon which our faith is built. Stir our faith today to follow as you lead. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Growing

BIBLE FOCUS: Matthew 7:21-27-8

Jesus said, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock..." (7:24).

There was a time when the social/justice-minded person was perceived as being disinterested in spiritual things. At the same time, people who were involved in prayer groups were seen as disengaged from the real issues affecting people's lives. This is a new day! Prayer and action go hand in hand.

Read and discuss the following taken from Jane Vennard, Intercessory Prayer: Praying for Friends and Enemies, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. 1995, pp. 60-61.

Praying and Acting

"Intercessory prayers are the expression of loving relationships. Paul told the faithful in Corinth that love is patient, love is kind. He told them that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:4, 7). When this love motivates service in the world, our actions are filled with compassion, hope, and a deep respect for those we serve. With this love, our actions become the very beat of the compassionate heart.

Sometimes we are called to action before we are called to prayer. We are hard at work before we recognize the gifts of intercessory prayer. When this occurs, we are not out of order. We have simply entered the cyclical process of prayer and action at a different point. A committed life of service will lead us into intercessory prayer; just as a deep and faithful prayer life will lead us into action.

God calls us into relationship with God and with neighbor. Whether we respond to this call by prayer or by action is of little importance. Prayer and action go hand in hand. We cannot have one without the other. God calls us out of God's own need for us to

be active participants in creation. Responding, however, lowers thresholds and opens our ears to God's transforming grace. To intercede for others through prayer and action immerses us in the process of conversion. It turns our lives around and we will never be the same."

JOURNAL TIME

Ask participants to reflect in their journals on the "Preferred Passion for Prayer," found on page 12. Do any of these categories describe your passion for prayer better than the others? Which one and why?

Going

Final thoughts:

Jesus is clear about the relationship of hearing and doing. It is all a part of discipleship. It flows out of our loving relationship with God, and begins to flow to others. What is God bringing to mind for you now? What will you do with that thought? Spend time journaling on that this week.

Closing Prayer

All may pray aloud, bringing before God persons who need special care. Seek God's guidance in responding to these needs. Close this time in prayer by blessing the person to your right in a brief sentence or two. End with the Lord's Prayer.

Psalms to Guide Your Times of Prayer

1. Adoration, Praise and Worship:

105
135
136
146
147-150

2. Confession of Sin:

6
32
38
51
85
103

3. Thanks be to God:

66
92
100
103
118

4. Supplication (prayers for yourself and intercession for others)

25
28
35
42
44

5. Life's Challenges:

55
57
61
71
86

6. Psalms for Meditation:

77
62
63
84
91



Prayer Possibilities

Preferred Passion for Prayer

One of the best ways to focus your prayer life is to identify the passion for which you may be called to intercede. God has already planted this in your heart. As one grows in a life of prayer, the desire to pray beyond one's needs increases. This tool is a guide showing that God scripts us to pray for specific needs and issues. Listen to your heart and identify which area best describes your passion to pray.

General Intercessor

Demonstrates...

- a heart for people
- persistence in situations
- tears
- compassion for strangers
- a compelling desire to pray for the sick
- attention to prayers for daily needs that arise

Social/Justice Intercessor

Compassion for those afflicted by...

- violence and war
- injustice
- prejudice
- inequality
- domestic violence
- drug abuse
- land, water and creation issues

Evangelism Intercessor

A heart to pray for...

- missionaries
- non-believers
- seekers
- neighbors
- salvation of the world (nations)

Local Congregational Intercessor

A passion to pray for...

- pastors
- congregational leaders
- worship services
- Sunday School
- various ministries
- congregational members

Specific Group Intercessor

Compelled to pray for...

- marriages
- children
- youth
- college students
- single adults
- two-parent families
- single parent families
- unborn children

Unpacking Your Preferred Passion for Prayer

General Intercessor

Possessing a heart for people, a general intercessor prays with compassion for the needs and suffering of others. Oftentimes, tears flow for strangers whose story moves the heart of the intercessor to seek God's blessing on that individual's life.

Social Justice Intercessor

Moved by the issues of the day that oppress and retain power over individuals and groups, social justice intercessors take action in standing up against the oppressive forces and will spiritually engage in battle on their behalf. Common prayer activities may include praying the newspaper, prayer walking in areas of violence, and engaging prayer as a regular part of social action.

Evangelism Intercessor

With a heart for those who live apart from an active faith in Jesus Christ, evangelism intercessors will actively pray for those who do not live for and serve Jesus. The primary focus of this prayer is to open their hearts and provide the right opportunity for them to come to faith in Jesus.

Local Congregation Intercessor

Out of a powerful love and appreciation for their congregation and its mission, local intercessors find it an honor to pray for their pastor and the congregational leaders. Some intercessors gather with the pastor an hour before worship and pray for her/him and upcoming worship services. Others may walk through the worship space and ask God to bless each person who will sit in that space. The same may be done in each classroom prior to Sunday School.

Specific Group Intercessor

Driven by specific areas of interest, these intercessors are willing to pray and do whatever is necessary to bring God's blessings to that group. They may be individual intercessors or have found a group of like-minded people in the community.

Prayer Possibilities

Ten Keys to a Successful Personal Prayer Plan

- 1. Schedule time to pray each day.** The earlier in the day, the better for your day.
- 2. Select a location that inspires you to pray.** Make it a creative, restful and quiet place. It may be as small as a corner with a shelf in your bedroom or a corner of your yard.
- 3. Set aside a niche for collecting small items that remind you of significant times with God.** If you are new to this, the collection can be as simple as a seashell, a rock, or a dried flower.
- 4. Select a few Christian symbols to inspire you** such as a cross, a candle or a Bible.
- 5. Remove distractions.** Tell others that you want 15 minutes alone. You do not need to answer the telephone, pager, or doorbell during this time.
- 6. Start small, like 15 minutes a day, so that you do not get discouraged.** Once you discover the value of this time, you will want to expand it.
- 7. Try different ways to pray until you find a structure that works for you.** Some people like more structure than others.
- 8. If you have a day where you do not keep your prayer time, do not allow guilt to bury you.** Simply plan to pray again tomorrow.
- 9. Many people find an advantage in being accountable to another person about their prayer plan.** Weekly check-ins can help to keep you focused and prevent legalism or apathy.
- 10. Schedule your prayer time for tomorrow at the end of today's prayers.** This helps to prevent you from forgetting this priority in your life.

Suggested Resources

General Resources on Prayer:

A Beginner's Guide to Prayer. Richard J. Beckman, Augsburg Fortress. 0-8066-2674-7
The Pocket Guide to Prayer, Gary Egeberg, Augsburg Fortress. 0-8066-3958-X
Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home, Richard J. Foster, Harper. 0-0606-2846-4
The ELCA Congregational Prayer Network, see www.prayingchurch.org
The Everyday, Anytime Guide to Prayer, Walt Kallestad, Augsburg Fortress. : 0-8066-2796-4

Contemplative Prayer:

Too Deep For Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina, Thelma Hall, Paulist Press. 0-8091-2959-0
Gathered in the Word: Praying the Scripture in Small Groups (Pathways in Spiritual Growth), Norvene Vest, Upper Room. 0-8358-0806-8
Living in the Presence: Spiritual Exercises to Open Our Lives to the Awareness of God, Tilden Edwards, Harper San Francisco. 0-0606-2127-3
The Awakened Heart: Opening Yourself to the Love You Need, Gerald May, Harper San Francisco. 0-0606-5473-2

Listening Prayer:

Listening Prayer: Learning to Hear God's Voice and Keep a Prayer Journal, Leanne Payne, Baker Books. 0-8010-5916-X
Hearing from God, Mary Ruth Swope, Whitaker House. 0-8836-8663-5
Joy of Listening to God, Joyce Huggett, Intervarsity Press. 0-8778-4729-0

Small Group Study on Prayer:

Praying: Meeting God in Daily Life, (Intersections Series), Lyn Klug, Augsburg Fortress. 0-8066-0136-1
The Workbook of Intercessory Prayer, Maxie Dunham, Upper Room. 0-8358-0382-1
The Workbook of Living Prayer, Maxie Dunham, Upper Room. 0-8358-0718-5

Prayer for your Pastor:

Your Pastor: Preyed on or Prayed For, Terry Teykl, Prayer Point Press. 1-5789-2044-2

Spiritual Warfare:

Prayer-Walking: Praying On-Site With Insight, Steve Hawthorne and Graham Kendrick, Creation House. 0-8841-9268-7

Strategic Prayer:

Informed Intercession, George Otis, Jr., Regal Books. 0-8307-1937-7