

SMALL GROUP PRAYER GUIDE

As we seek to pray in a small group we must realize that it is different than praying alone and praying with the entire congregation. To some extent it shares the benefit of both, but we must be sensitive to the dynamics of praying in a small group. Below are suggestions taken from other articles on small group prayer. At the bottom of the guide you will find different topics to choose from as your pray.

A Balancing Act Group prayer—unlike private prayer—involves both vertical and horizontal dimensions. When we pray in a group, we are praying *to* God (the vertical dimension) *with* other people (the horizontal dimension). Effective group prayer requires a balance between both of these dimensions. When the horizontal isn't taken into consideration, the result tends to be long, winding prayers that diminish overall participation in the prayer time. When the vertical is lacking, prayers are often said more for the benefit of other people than for God, and can move the focus away from God rather than toward him.

Balancing the vertical and horizontal dimensions of community prayer doesn't happen automatically. However, our group has discovered some principles and practices that can help. Let's look at the horizontal aspect first.

Focus. One way to improve a group's ability to pray as a team is to focus the topic. Prayer times in the early church often centered on a single overriding concern. As the followers of Christ waited on the Holy Spirit they did so in focus prayer (see Acts 1:14). When the disciples faced persecution in Acts 4 their response was united prayer (see Acts 4:23-33). Also, when the church at Antioch was ready to send missionaries out to share the gospel and plant churches they prepared and sent them out in united prayer (see Acts 13:1-4). In all three of the above references, God advanced His evangelistic mission through united prayer.

Narrowing the focus in this way allows a number of people to express to God their desires about a particular situation. When multiple subjects for prayer are opened simultaneously, participants often skip from topic to topic rather than developing a prayer together in unity and agreement.

This format could be adapted for nearly any prayer focus. For example, if you're praying for members' personal requests, focus on one person at a time instead of gathering everyone's requests at the beginning. You'll experience greater unity in prayer and help people remember what to pray for.

Short and sweet. Praying short prayers is another way to improve the horizontal dimension of group prayer. Our tendency, however, is to do the opposite. Long, winding prayers may be perfectly appropriate in the private prayer, but they are seldom conducive to community prayer. Prolonged prayers often cause group members to get distracted or their minds to wander. God may have an infinite attention span, but we do not!

Centered on God. First, we remember that God is our real audience. In a group, it's easy to slip into addressing other people in prayer rather than God: "Lord, may *we* be more seeker-focused, may *we* reach out to our lost neighbors, may *we* be prepared at all times to speak the gospel." This type of prayer draws the focus away from God and often leaves the group feeling preached to rather than prayed for.

Here's how we might pray for the same subject in a way that puts the attention on God: "Lord, would *you* give us a greater heart for the lost and open doors for us to share the gospel?" The distinction in wording may be subtle, but the difference in focus is clear. The second prayer clearly asks God, not the group, to act. Praying this way honors God's sovereignty and encourages group members to seek him for life-change rather than attempting to accomplish it on their own.

Kingdom Requests - It seems Jesus intended "your kingdom come, your will be done" to be the context in which all other prayers are brought to God. Often, however, our prayers are dominated by immediate concerns such as financial or medical issues. Those are valid topics for prayer, but it's possible to "seek first his kingdom" as we're

praying for them. We pray for God's financial provision, but we pray also to be content with what He has given, for wisdom in financial decisions, and for a steward's heart. We pray for healing, but we pray also that God will develop Christlike character in us through our trials. ¹

Praying this way may not come naturally at first. But as God works in our hearts, we begin to desire what he desires, and the focus of our requests shifts. We seek his bigger purposes—even as we ask him to act in the daily circumstances of our lives.

God's Will and God's Glory – As we pray for any subject our requests should always be for His will to be done and that He would be glorified. Continue to see every type of prayer and every prayer request through this lens. Guide your people to this perspective as well. This will create prayer requests that God will hear and answer.

Below are various prayer points that can be used as you prepare for your small group's prayer time. Remember the goal is God-centered, focused prayers that allow the group to come together in agreement and pray together as one as they long for God's will and God's glory.

One way to ensure a well-balanced biblical approach to prayer that allows for strategic prayer is to organize each prayer gathering around the following areas of prayer:

- Personal prayer concerns
- Congregational (corporate) prayer concerns
- Kingdom prayer concerns

These three areas of prayer represent the three major prayer patterns that are taught and modeled throughout the New Testament. The model prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 and Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17, as well as Paul's prayers in his Epistles, fall into one of these three areas.²

Additional prayer points are listed below. Your leader or group can look over this list and choose which prayer focus you would like to focus on during the prayer time.

Pray for all Believers and the Church Universal

Pray for all believers for an increase in the knowledge and Spirit of Christ; that the Church will radiate the light of the Gospel and bring the name of Christ fame on the earth **(Hab. 2: 14) (Eph. 4:11-13)**

Pray for One Another (Be a Brother's Keeper)

Pray for every member of the fellowship by name and for God's manifest intervention and welfare; pray for a greater encounter and relationship with God **(Jam. 5:16); (Gal. 6:2)**

Pray for the Salvation of Souls in IBC

Pray that God will reveal Himself to members of IBC who have not come to the knowledge of Christ and to salvation. That His grace and truth will salvation of their souls. **(John 3:16) (2 Peter 3:8-10)**

Pray for Healing, Wholeness, and Restoration

Pray for healing in every area of life, especially bodily healing in these unsure times of the coronavirus pandemic; that God will bring wholeness and restoration (*Jam. 5:15*) (*2 Chron. 7:14*)

Pray for the Fear of the Lord and Renewed Commitment to Christ and the Gospel.

Pray for renewed commitment to the person of Jesus Christ, the Gospel, God's will, and God's counsel; pray that God will inspire in you reverential fear for His word and name. (*2 Pet. 3:18*) (*Mal. 4:21*)

Pray for Unity of Purpose in the Fellowship and against Division or Prejudice

Pray that God will bind us believers with a cord that cannot be broken; that He will unite us against the spirit of division and prejudice, and move us to pray for, care for, and share with others. (*1 Cor. 1:10*) (*Ps. 133:1-3*)

Ideas for this prayer guide were taken from SMALLGROUPS.COM © 2010 Christianity Today FIFTEEN WAYS TO LEAD GROUP PRAYER: A Practical Guide for Those who Lead Others in Prayer By J. Chris Schofield, Ph.D.