



Lead Your Small Group to Experience God Through Prayer

By Karen Hurston,
adapted from
“Experiencing God Through Prayer in Small Groups,”
breakout session at Willow Creek Small Groups
Conference

Prayer can be the glue that holds a small group together and the fuel that makes it soar. It is the means by which leaders and group members can engage in ministry to each other. Learn a variety of prayer methods, both as individuals and as a group, to connect people and their needs to God.

Goal:

To equip small group leaders with various types of group prayer that foster intimacy and reliance on God and his ability to work in our lives.



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How to use "Leading Your Small Group to Experience God Through Prayer."

The following materials can be used for either personal or group training to increase the effectiveness of prayer in small groups.

Training Others

If you use this material to train other small group leaders, you may want to modify the handouts as necessary. Personalize them by printing on church letterhead or adding your church logo to the design. Each handout can be used in separate, brief training sessions, or you can combine all of the material into one session.

Read through the materials and any listed Scriptures ahead of time. Then prepare the materials as needed:

- Make enough copies for all of the participants.
- Provide food, drink, and other materials that will make your training sessions more comfortable.

Allow five minutes for everyone to read through each handout. Then discuss the questions provided, or consider questions such as:

- "Why are these principles important for a successful small group?"
- "How well does your small group currently incorporate these principles?"
- "What one or two practical steps could we take in the next year to improve in this area?"

Pray

Ask God for help in improving the prayer lives of leaders and the prayer experience of small groups.

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Leading Small Group Prayer

Let ministry and leadership values guide your group's prayer life.

The first step needed to improve your group's prayer experience is an honest look at how you are doing now, both collectively and as leaders. Use this set of questions and the accompanying forms to assess the quality of your group's prayer life.

How Prayer Friendly is Our Small Group?

Evaluate the situation by using the form "How Prayer Friendly Is My Small Group?" (handout 4-A). Rate yourself in each category. This assessment will tell you one of three things about your group: That it is doing very well; that it has a satisfactory prayer life, but needs a renewed heart for prayer as well as a few new ideas and attitudes; or that your group's prayer life needs urgent attention.

How Healthy is the Leader's Prayer Life?

The basic leadership principle for making corporate prayer fun and exciting to small groups usually starts with the prayer life of the leader and the leadership team. One of the ways to recharge our prayer batteries is to use the "21-Day Adventure in Persistent Prayer" form (handout 4-B) included in these materials.

How Frequent are Your Prayers?

The leader who prays daily for each person in the group is more likely to grow and multiply that group. Do this by using the "Prayer Triggers" guide (handout 4-C). This will help you focus your prayers more throughout your day.

How Often Do You Share Success Stories?

The leader needs to start each small group gathering with answers to prayer. One of the reasons we don't pray is because all we hear are prayer requests. We become discouraged because prayer can seem to be something we do that doesn't really make a difference. Motivate the members of a small group to pray by sharing the answers to prayer that some have already experienced.

How Much Variety Is in Our Group Prayer?

Your small group needs variety both in types of prayer and the people who lead in prayer. Avoid having the same person lead in prayer every time. The more people you get involved in corporate prayer, the better it tends to be.

Do We Have a Prayer Captain?

Sometimes corporate prayer is aided by the appointing of a prayer captain or prayer secretary. One of the responsibilities of the prayer captain is to keep a record of prayer requests. Use the "Small Groups Prayer Diary" (handout 4-D) to accomplish this.

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Do Values Drive Our Prayer?

A set of core values is necessary for healthy corporate prayer. Corporate prayer should bring that fresh sense of God's reality. It is to be intertwined with worship and thanksgiving. A good explanation of this quality of prayer is explained in Scripture. Read Psalm 100:4 and Philippians 4:6.

Are Group Members Taking Steps to Strengthen Their Personal Prayer Lives?

Use the form "My Next Steps" (handout 4-E). If you're not praying at all, start out with a goal of five or ten minutes. Search for those short pockets of time we all have during the day and devote them to prayer. Another idea is to increase prayer with those on the leadership team. Take the initiative to make caring phone calls or prayer visits to group members.

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Many Ways to Pray

Learn these different ways to pray as a small group.

A small group leader can add variety to the group experience by experimenting with different kinds of prayer. The objective is to enrich the prayer life of your small group, both within the group sessions and between meetings.

Don't go to your small groups and try all these ways to pray at the same time. Instead, introduce one new way to pray at a time, and sometimes even skip a meeting before another way is introduced.

Pair Prayer

Whenever a small group has eight or more people, consider pair prayer to ensure each person's requests get attention. Group members pair up. One person will share a need or concern, and then their partner will share a concern. Each person prays for the other. Make sure no one is overlooked even if you have to have a threesome. Give each person the time needed to pray.

Meditative Response Prayer

Choose one person to read a selected Scripture out loud, for example, Psalm 139. Everyone else closes their eyes and asks for God through his Holy Spirit to speak to them. After the passage is read, ask each person to think about one thing they sensed God speaking about as the psalm was read. Then, each person will turn to someone else and share with each other one thing God spoke to them about.

Popcorn Praise Prayer

When you are popping corn, you never know which kernel is going to suddenly pop next. The same principle works in circle prayer—you know someone is going to pray next, but you don't know whom. In popcorn praise, you want people to pray in normal tones. The prayer should be very brief and from the heart. If you get a person who prays a paragraph instead of a phrase, make sure you pray next, and model a brief prayer. The goal is to leave time for everyone to pray. The leader begins, with others popping and praising as the Spirit leads them.

Alphabet Prayer

This prayer is done in groups of three or four people. One person starts by taking the letter A, and briefly thanking God for something, tangible or intangible, beginning with that letter. The next person takes the letter B, and so on through the alphabet. The prayer group will stand and hold hands. When each person is done praying, they squeeze the hand of the next person to signal that it's now their turn to pray. If there is someone in the circle that does not feel like praying aloud they can go ahead and squeeze the hand of the next person. If someone squeezes your hand and hasn't prayed, then you take whatever the next letter is. Don't skip a letter.

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Conversational Prayer

This is one of the most common types of prayer in small groups and is usually motivated by repentance, supplication, and intercession for others. One problem with this approach is that often more time is taken receiving prayer requests than actually praying. In addition, unless you've written the requests down, you can forget some of them. So do not take the request, just pray it spontaneously in one- or two-sentence prayers.

Burden Bearer's Prayer

In a group of three, have one person give a prayer request. The leader appoints one individual to be the burden bearer. The burden bearer leads prayer for the request, while the rest of the group bows their heads, listens, and agrees with the request. Then the process repeats with a different request and different burden bearer.

Jericho Prayer

This kind of corporate prayer is often the best response to crisis situations. If there's someone in your small group who is in crisis, phone them every day for seven consecutive days. Remind them of a Scripture and say, "Let's have a brief word of prayer" on the phone for a breakthrough in that area of need or concern. Another method is for the group, at a time other than a regular meeting time, to gather together for a focused time of prayer. Or you can establish a telephone prayer chain.

Prayers for the Lost and Seekers

Empty chair prayer is where one chair is always left empty to represent a seeker that the whole group wants to reach. In "most wanted poster" prayer, group members bring either a photograph, or the name printed out of a seeker they want to reach. The picture will be put on a poster to be used as a visual aid to praying for that person. Prayer walking is another alternative. Walk through a community and silently pray for salvation to come to this household or for God to do a work with that family in whatever home you're passing.

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Prayer Visits

Expand your prayer experiences beyond the group meeting.

What happens between group meetings can fuel faith, enjoyment, and ease with corporate prayer. The more comfortable people are with each other, the more readily they will pray together. Make prayer visits. Sometimes it's good to visit in pairs. For onlookers, or people who are struggling with difficult situations, it's good to schedule a prayer visit. Call and say, "Hey, I just wanted to drop by for a few minutes to chat with you and maybe even pray together for a moment."

Three Basic Principles

There are three basic principles in a prayer visit. First, you want to connect to God yourself. You want to pray that God by his Holy Spirit would guide you during that visit. You also want to connect the person to God. In the beginning pray, "Lord, I want to thank you for the opportunity to be in this person's home, and I ask that you guide us." The next thing is connecting yourself to the person. Ask them a little bit about themselves. Then ask, "Is there any one thing that concerns you right now that we can pray about?"

Connecting a Person to God

There are other avenues for a leader to connect a person to God. The first is Scripture. Have you ever been in your own devotional time and it seems like a Scripture pops out at you? Many times that's the same Scripture the Lord would have you share with another person. Do not take your Bible on a visit. Think of a Scripture reference, and ask, "Can you get your Bible? There's something I'd like you to read." Then ask, "Would you read it? I don't have my Bible with me." That enters them into the process. Then you can pray for a specific area of concern, or for a target lost person. Turn to them and say, "Is there someone who is not yet in the kingdom or someone who has not yet made a decision to receive Jesus?" It's always a good idea to complete a visit with a prayer of blessing for the home and family.

Another powerful tool is caring phone calls. There are three objectives of the caring phone call. You want to give thanks or encourage, find a need or concern of that person, and pray for a lost person. Keep a ministry log to assist you or someone you designate. The log should contain information such as the name of the person being prayed for, background information on their family and life status, and the nature of the prayer request. After the call is made, note what was prayed for and then follow up on the status of the prayer request.

Explore more of the various creative ways that prayer will flow best in your small group and reach the widest amount of participation. At the same time, leaders should re-examine their own prayer lives by using the "My Next Steps" form. Ask God for an even greater release of his blessings in our personal lives, and in our groups.

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How “Prayer Friendly” Is My Small Group?

1. Regular consistency: We regularly have times of prayer in our small group meetings, and usually have a sense of God’s presence.

0	1	2	3

Not really	On occasion	Often	Consistently

2. Wide prayer participation: We have wide participation in prayer in our small group meetings: almost all the people of our group actively participate in prayer times; a variety of people in our group take turns leading and directing prayer times.

0	1	2	3

Not really	On occasion	Often	Consistently

3. Prayer excitement/enjoyment: The most exciting and/or enjoyable times in our group meetings are when we pray together.

0	1	2	3

Not really	On occasion	Often	Consistently

4. Variety of ways to pray: We use a variety of ways to pray in our small group meetings.

0	1	2	3

Not really	On occasion	Often	Consistently

5. Prayer persistence: We continue praying for requests in our group until we sense God answer (for future reference, see, “Small Group Prayer Diary”).

0	1	2	3

Not really	On occasion	Often	Consistently

6. Sharing answers to prayer: When we hear of an answer to prayer in our group, we share it before our next prayer time; if we don’t hear of an answer, we share a biblical example of answered prayer.

0	1	2	3

Not really	On occasion	Often	Consistently

7. Personal prayer: I have daily times of prayer and devotions in my personal life.

0	1	2	3

Not really	On occasion	Often	Consistently

Scoring: 18 to 21, excellent; 14 to 17, satisfactory; 13 and under, needs plenty of work.

My 21-Day Adventure in Persistent Prayer

Jesus modeled a life of prayer and taught the importance of persistence (Luke 18:1–8). Part of persistence includes developing “holy habits.” You easily form a new habit by doing the same thing for 21 consecutive days. By completing this page you will begin on your own adventure in persistent prayer—starting first with reading God’s Word.

For the Next 21 Days:

I will read _____ chapter(s) in the Bible each day.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

I will pray daily for my spouse/parent(s)/children/family members.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

I will pray daily for my pastor, his family, and our church leadership.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

I will pray daily for three unchurched people I know.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

I will pray daily for members of my small group.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

Prayer Triggers

Prayer triggers remind you to pray, as well as of the specifics of those prayers. The leader who prays daily for each person in his/her group is more likely to have a healthy group. Keep prayer lists at prominent spots, such as bathroom or dresser mirrors, car visors, or refrigerator doors.

My Family Members

Your spouse and/or family members should see you as a better spouse and parent after you become a small group leader. List the names of family members to the space on the left, and be faithful to pray and bless each one daily.

My Pastor and Church Leadership

Senior Pastor and Spouse:

Pray for your senior pastor and spouse, staff pastors and spouses, and others in positions of leadership.

Staff Pastor(s) and Spouse(s):

My Group Members

On the left, first list the name of your apprentice/intern/assistant, then of your host person/couple, then of your faithful, periodic and inactive group members. You might also want to list potential group members.

Friends I Want to See God Bless

“Friends I Want to See God Bless” are lost or unchurched people you want to reach with the gospel and involvement in your small group. Because that person might see this list in your home/car, the title has been changed to be more acceptable to them.

Small Group Prayer Diary

Date	Person Making Request	Nature of Request	Date and Way Answered

My Next Steps

- ✓ Strengthen my personal prayer life

- ✓ Increase prayer with those on my leadership team

- ✓ Make caring phone calls and/or prayer visits to my group members

- ✓ Consider appointing a prayer captain or prayer secretary

- ✓ Discover the variety of ways that prayer will flow best in my small group, reaching the widest amount of participation

Additional Resources

Books, downloads, and websites to help improve your group's prayer life.

Building Church Leaders: Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International.

- 📄 www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com
- “Healthy Small Groups” Training Theme and PowerPoint
- “Growing Small Groups” Training Theme and PowerPoint
- “Spiritual Formation” Training Theme and PowerPoint
- “Prayer and Awakening” Training Theme and Power Point
- “Spiritual Growth” Assessment Pack

WillowGroups: Small groups resources site of the Willow Creek Association

- 📄 www.willowcreek.com/smallgroups

Hurston Ministries and Consulting Associates: Church consulting firm founded by Karen Hurston and her father, John Hurston

- 📄 www.hurstonministries.org

Breakthrough Cell Groups, by *Karen Hurston* (Touch Publications, 2001; ISBN 1880828316)

Prayer by *Ole Hallesby* (Augsburg, 1994; ISBN 080662700X)

Deepening Your Conversation with God by *Ben Patterson* (Bethany House, 2001; ISBN 0764223518)

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home by *Richard Foster* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992; ISBN 0060628464)

Small Group Outreach by *Jeffrey Arnold* (InterVarsity Press, 1998; ISBN 0830811702)

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