

Prayer

Resource Packet

Colonial Presbyterian Church

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Colonial Presbyterian Church

The Art of Group Prayer

Making your small group prayer time meaningful.

By JoHannah Reardon

We wrapped up our small group as we usually do, with a time for everyone to share their prayer requests. After we closed in prayer, Tom approached my husband and me. He was considering dropping out of our small group because he felt overwhelmed by the prayer requests. It seemed to him as though everyone's problems were insurmountable, and although we'd been praying for the same things for months, it didn't seem as though anyone's life was getting any better.

Tom's comment was a wake-up call about the way we handled the prayer time in our small group. My husband and I did some soul and Scripture searching to find out what we might be doing wrong. Nowhere in Scripture did we find prayers for Sally's arthritis, Mark's unruly children, or Bonnie's rotten work conditions. The prayers in the Bible were powerful and life-changing, full of God's power and glory.

Consider Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:16-23. In fact, read it aloud with feeling:

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Wow! Such a prayer puts arthritis, unruly children, and rotten work conditions in perspective.

So should we ignore our problems and pretend they don't exist? Not at all. Instead, we should transform them by putting them into the bigger context of what God wants to do in our lives. We can still take the prayer requests, but consider praying for them in the following ways.

Make Them God-Centered

When you pray, remember who you are talking to. You have been given the privilege of coming before the creator of the universe. This is the God who made everything that lives or has its being, and he has given you the honor of bringing requests before him. That's why so many teachers tell us to start our prayers with adoration. When we tell God how great, powerful, and magnificent he is, it reminds us that he truly is those things. It gives us a sense of awe and expectancy that something great could come out of this conversation we are having with the one who can do anything.

Paul spent over half of his prayer in Ephesians 1 extolling God's virtues. Scholars agree that when Paul wrote this book, he was in prison. He could have listed a litany of prayer requests that would have made ours pale in comparison, but instead he focused on who God is. Surely the power of that prayer carried him farther than any listing of complaints. It also showed the Ephesians how to pray victoriously in the midst of whatever they were facing.

Make Them Praise-Filled

Paul started his prayer by saying, "I have not stopped giving thanks ... " He'd learned that the key to praying is not to focus on a list of troubles, but to praise God for what he has done. How can we do that? How can we give thanks in everything, as Paul later admonished us to do in his letter to the Thessalonians?

To do that, we have to trust that God knows what he's doing. Sally has to be able to say, "Thank you, God, for my arthritis. I don't get why I have to have it, but you do, so I'm going to trust you with it. I'd be delighted if you'd take it away, but if not, I trust you will use it for good in my life."

Mark has to say, "Thank you for my unruly children. They are a gift from you, and I know you will equip me with wisdom to know how to help them. It may be a bumpy road, and they may have to go through some hard times before they learn their lessons, but I'm trusting that you will bring them into a loving relationship with you."

Bonnie must learn to say, "Thank you, Lord, for my job. You led me there, so I'm trusting that you want to use me with my coworkers, and that you will equip me to do this job well. If you are leading me elsewhere, I trust that you will make that clear, too. Teach me what you want me to learn through this difficulty."

Make Them Life-Changing

Tom was frustrated with our prayer time because it seemed nothing ever changed. Maybe that's because we weren't praying for the right change. I've noticed that the vast majority of our prayers are for God to change our circumstances. Maybe God doesn't want to change our circumstances. Maybe he wants to change us.

That doesn't mean he won't ever change our circumstances. I have seen God supply needs, open up opportunities, and heal people in incredible ways. But I've also spent years praying for something to change that never does. That should be my first clue that I may not be praying for the right thing.

Looking at our three people again may give us a clue as to how to think about this. If Sally has been praying for God to heal her arthritis for years, and he hasn't done it, she should probably focus on how he wants to use it in her life. Maybe God wants her to start a support group for other arthritis sufferers. Or possibly he wants her to express more compassion for others who are suffering, by praying for them or sending money to a research organization that is looking for a cure. Perhaps he just wants to get her attention—and as C.S. Lewis said, pain is his megaphone.

Mark needs to pray for his children the way Paul prayed for the Ephesians—that God would give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that they may know him better. He needs to pray that his children would know the hope to which God has called them, their glorious inheritance, and God's incomparably great power. Mark needs to pray these things for himself, too, so that he will be able to model such a walk with God for his children.

Bonnie should honestly express to God her frustrations with her job. If she has a possibility of changing jobs, she needs to pray for God's confirmation and wisdom about doing so. She needs to get the advice of other godly people to see their perspectives. If she has done all that, and feels that God wants her to stay in her job, she needs to ask him what he wants to accomplish in and through her. Bonnie should ask God to change her perspective and give her joy. After all, if Paul could find joy while sitting in a prison cell, Bonnie can probably find joy in her job if she lets God open her eyes to it.

Our small group prayers changed after Tom complained. We realized that we were treating prayer as a complaint session, when in reality it is an incredible opportunity to gain the wisdom, direction, and power of the King of kings who rules all time and places.

*JoHannah Reardon is an associate editor with ChristianBibleStudies.com.
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Divide, Connect and Grow

One great way to get your group to open up

One concern of nearly every small group leader is how to get everyone to open up. This is especially problematic in larger groups. If your group has more than seven people, here's a great technique for encouraging sharing:

Separate your group into discussion circles of three or four people. With a greater opportunity to talk in a small circle, people will connect more with the study, apply more quickly what they're learning and ultimately get more out of it.

A small circle also encourages a quiet person to participate and tends to minimize the effects of a more vocal or dominant member. And it can help people feel more loved in your group. When you gather again at the end of the section, you can have one person summarize the highlights from each circle.

Small circles are also helpful during prayer time. People who are unaccustomed to praying aloud feel more comfortable trying it with just two or three others. Also, prayer requests won't take as much time, so circles will have more time to actually pray.

When you gather back with the whole group, have one person from each circle briefly update everyone on the prayer requests. People are more willing to pray in small circles if they know that the whole group will hear all the prayer requests.

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Ideas for Small Group Worship and Prayer:

(also see “Many Ways to Pray” article)

If you are feeling a bit “stuck” in prayer, try several of these ideas!

1. To vary things, use prayer partners or have the large group break into sub-groups. This is particularly helpful in groups of 12 or more. At times, you may even want to have the men and women pray in separate groups.
2. **From “Ice Breakers”:** Q and P (Questions and Prayer)
This is a great way to get to know people better who already may know a little about each other.
Give each person an index card. On one side, write their name and a prayer request – and inform that this will be shared later. On the other side, have them write down two true statements about themselves, and one false – mix up where the false is at as later, you will go around the room and share the three statements – and everyone will guess which one is the false statement. When it comes time for prayer, invite each person to find one person to pray for – by doing so, each person will be talking with two people – one person who takes their card and prayer request (as a reminder to pray for that person), and one person they are asking for their card and prayer request.

3. **E-mail Prayer / Prayer Reminder**

We are in the 00's and if you ordinarily communicate with friends and family by using e-mail, consider this method to write specific prayers for someone, to ask for prayers for a concern or joys. An example of that one LIFE Group uses a scribe to record prayer requests, and to send them out as reminders with scripture attached as well (names and study left out for confidentiality)

Hello _____,

We had a meaningful gathering this week as _____ continued teaching about _____ and the sense of emptiness we have in our lives until we find God. Sharing our stories of how our lives have been filled with hope can be an encouragement to those who don't know Him.

_____: Praises for _____ Pray for the Lord to help her to keep up the discipline she is developing and that she would receive the Lord's spiritual encouragement when results or expectations are not what she expects. Pray that the Lord would give her victory and success in achieving the things she has set before her.

John 15:4-5 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing.

_____: The Lord has been placing strong desires upon _____ heart for the church to be transformed so that there is a wide outreach to seekers so that they can find a place of service. She desires that the church would become an instrument of change for those who don't know where to serve and would ultimately draw them into the Body of Christ.

Matt. 5:14-16 You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

4. **Egg Carton Prayer (great at Easter or anytime)**

In the 12 sections of an empty egg carton, write your prayers of praise, thanksgiving, concerns, petitions for others or anything else that you want to talk to the Lord about. Remember the 91st Psalm ...He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you shall find shelter. Since it takes 21 days for "eggs" to hatch; we give these prayer eggs to the Lord. This will help us to truly trust him with our cares and concerns. At the end of three weeks reread your prayers and see how God has said yes, no or wait!

5. **Guided Prayer Method: ACTS**

One structure for prayer is given by the acronym "ACTS", representing adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication (or intercession.)

Adoration is to adore God, to worship him and to fulfill the commandment to love him with all of our heart, mind and soul. As we spend time in adoration, we praise God for who He is - our Creator, our Sustainer and our Redeemer.

Confession allows us to clear away the things in the relationship between you and God which are displeasing to Him. All of us have sinned. St John writes in his epistle "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 Jn 1:8,9)

Thanksgiving. From childhood we are brought up to say "Thank You" when someone does something for us, or gives us a gift. Each moment God is blessing us, every minute we can recall the wonderful things that God has done for us, and the gifts that we have been given. And so, we need to be constantly thanking God for his blessings. In writing to Timothy, Paul makes it clear that we also need to be giving thanks for everyday, worldly things "*I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*" 1 Tim 2:1.

Supplication or Intercession. Finally we come to ask God for our needs and the needs of others. There are many demands on our prayer time - many topics and issues that we could pray for, so we need to choose, and to be specific.

Pray for others: In the epistles of St Paul, we read of him praying for those he has led to faith, and asking them also to pray for him. So, you too can pray for other Christians, and encourage them to pray for you. Pray for your family members, and for neighbors and friends. It's also good to pray for those who don't know Jesus to come to faith - many Christians have come to believe in Christ through the prayers of others.

Pray for world issues: for peace in difficult situations, for leaders and those in influential positions, for global issues such as care of God's environment, justice for the poor, relief of suffering in less developed countries, and other issues that come to you.

Pray for your own needs: It's easy to neglect this, but Jesus encourages us to do so in the Lord's Prayer - the model for prayer that He gave us.

6. **Guided Prayer Method: Hand Prayer**

Use your hand as a reminder of those we need to pray for. *Thumb*: those closest to you, family and close friends; *Pointer*: those who lead and guide you, teachers, pastors, police, coaches; *Middle*: the tall finger reminds us of those in authority, presidents, mayors, student government officials; *Ring*: this weak finger is for those in our life who are ill, disabled, lonely, unhappy; *Pinky*: the smallest and last finger is a reminder to pray for ourselves!

7. **Personal Intercession Mode of Praying**

For small groups, this is a highly recommended prayer method. It is important that every disciple learns to pray (intercede) in the presence of others.

With this method, there is no need to have each person elaborate on their prayer need; rather, have them do so in prayer “as if” Jesus was sitting right there in the room with you. There are a number of ways to handle this, including simply announcing the prayer method and bowing your heads and starting (remember, you will want to model the prayer style the first time so everyone gets on board with understanding).

Another way to handle this is truly to engage the prayer time as a conversation with the presence of the Lord within the room. In this case, simply open the prayer time as conversation and sharing the prayer needs aloud—with eyes open and conversation flowing—simply invoke Jesus’ intervention in the midst of the sharing. An example may be instructive here. We will share a prayer conversation with Lori, Don, and Sue. In this time, their eyes are open and for all practical purposes, it would look like they were just having a conversation.

Lori: “I’m really struggling with my job right now. There’s this manager who can only find faults with everything I do and I’m feeling really frustrated.”

Don: “Lord, help Lori to know in this difficult time that she’s one of your children—and that you see her as she is: a great disciple of yours.”

Sue: “Yeah, but also help Lori to learn from this and to grow in her own faith, especially about how to work with difficult people.”

Lori: “But I don’t feel very charitable towards him. Lord, give me patience.”

Sue: “And remind her that the manager is on a faith journey as well—but maybe he’s lost his way. Help Lori to see her role as one of your representatives.”

And the conversational prayer would continue as others shared their prayer needs in conversation.

8. **Feel the Injustice – Prayer Activities**

Through a variety of prayer methods about injustice in the world, go to this link:

[http://www1.salvationarmy.org.uk/uki/www_uki.nsf/0/58FE162EE95E4536802571EF003EACF5/\\$file/Creative%20Prayer%20Ideas.pdf](http://www1.salvationarmy.org.uk/uki/www_uki.nsf/0/58FE162EE95E4536802571EF003EACF5/$file/Creative%20Prayer%20Ideas.pdf)

Examples:

Breaking Chains Activity

Give each member of the group a slip of paper, approximately 2X8 cm. (Alternatively, use pre-prepared paper chain packs.) Ask each person to write a prayer for the victims or perpetrators of human trafficking on their slip of paper. Join the strips into one long chain. Invite the group to hold the chain above their heads. Then read a prayer out loud together, and when you reach the ‘amen’, everyone should demolish as much of the chain as they can, as a sign of God’s desire for the chains of injustice to be broken.

BAND-AID Activity

Give each person a band-aid to put on. This is a reminder and source for praying for those who are hurting and suffering both physically or emotionally.

9. **“Just In Time” Prayer**

When someone mentions a difficulty they are facing, stop and pray right then for that person and the situation. You will find that when you reach the end of your group time, most people will have shared, and will have been prayed for as well. This is a great way to eliminate the taking of prayer requests for 10 minutes and praying for them all in 1 minute at the end of the night.

10. **Spotlight Prayer**

Each time your group meets, select one or two people to be in the prayer spotlight. Everyone gives thanks for that person and names the gifts God has given that person.

11. **Washed Away**

Each person is given a washable marker to write on their palm one sin they want washed away for their lives. Bring out a basin of water, soap and a towel and have each person wash their own hands or even those of a neighbor. Through God's everlasting grace, we are forgiven when we turn from our sins. The amen comes when everyone raises their clean palms.

12. **Web Prayer**

One person begins by holding a ball of yarn or string and then offers a sentence prayer. He/she hold on to the end and tosses the ball across the circle. The next person offers a prayer, holds on to string and then tosses the ball to someone else. This continues until all have participated. Close by thanking God for the connected faith community.

13. **Pray Scripture into people's lives**

The leader prays the first one to show how. For example, 1 Thessalonians 3:13 says “May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” The leader prays, “Dear Lord, please strengthen my heart-level determination to do what is right. Give me your grace to make decisions that lead to holiness. Jesus, I look forward to your return. ... etc.”

14. **Pray4Missionary**

If your group has adopted a missionary for Pray4Missionary.org, take time to review their requests, pray for them, and then send an e-mail or card to them to let them know that they are being supported through prayer! If you would like to adopt one, please go to www.colonialkc.org/newlife/pray4missionary or e-mail pray4missionary@colonialkc.org.

15. **Pray for our World**

Take a newspaper from that day or week. Have the group go through it and find issues and people to pray for. Then, pray for these people and current events.

16. **God of Faithfulness**

For each answered prayer place a rock in a glass jar. As it fills up over the school year, it serves as a visual reminder of God's power and faithfulness.

Blessings Exercise

Over and over the Bible tells us to rejoice in the Lord, give thanks, and pray continuously.

Read the following scriptures--assign to those in your group who like to read aloud:

- a. Philippians 4:4-8
1 Thessalonians 5:1
- b. Romans 12:12
1 Chronicles 16:8
Psalm 28:6-7
Psalm 100
- c. Leader: Read the old time hymn, "Count Your Blessings" or another song of your choice, such as "Blessed Be the Name" and "Give Thanks".
- d. Leader: Say something like, over and over, the writers of Scripture (and composers) encourage us to give thanks, be joyful, and to pray continuously. Let's spend some time together doing just that! We are going to count our blessings...we are going to name them one by one.
- e. In popcorn style, have your group speak out things that give them real joy. Allow 3-5 minutes to do this.
- f. Next, have your group pray sentence prayers of thanks like, "Lord thank you for my job." Pray several different times, in popcorn style, as things come to mind. Again allow for several minutes of thanksgiving.
- g. Ask for each person to thank God for one circumstance that is not necessarily something they are particularly happy about, but that they are trusting God will work out.
- h. Close this time by thanking God for his many blessings, and for all the circumstances of life, because we know and trust that God is working all things out for good.

Pray the Promises of God's Name

This could be used as a responsive reading. In addition, you may want to pause after each one, and name a particular need someone has in the group and invoke the name of God for that need. Such as "Jehovah Rapha: The God who heals me." God, we pray for healing in the life of our friend _____. We believe that You are the great physician and put our concern for _____ in Your capable hands...

THE NAMES OF GOD

Option: Play and/or sing the song "In Christ Alone" by Stuart Townend and Keith Getty

In Christ alone, we find our answers to our needs, **for in His name we find our compass and an understanding love that has no limit.** For God's name is:

Elohim:

The strong Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, the One in Three and the Three in One

El Elyon:

The Most High God who is supreme over all, sovereign, and strong

El Olam:

The everlasting God, unchangeable and inexhaustible

He is the One who is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.

Adonai:

The majestic God who is my master. (or) The majestic God in whose name we glory.

Jehovah Jireh:

The God who provides for His people. (or) God who is my provider.

Yahweh Tsidkenu:

He is the means of my journey to wholeness and righteousness –

He is the light in the darkness.

El Shaddai:

He is God Almighty, our loving supply and comfort.

He is passionately in love with me.

Jehovah Nissi:

The Lord is my banner, our rallying point and means of victory – He fights for me.

He gives voice to the voiceless, the defender of widows and orphans, and

God of the poor and excluded.

Yahweh Shalom:

The God who is my peace - a Father of compassion, a Comforter in sorrow,

a Refuge for those in distress.

Jehovah Rapha:

The God who heals me

Jehovah Ro'i:

The God who is my shepherd, who sees me always, watching out and caring for me, for

He is the One who is able to keep me from falling.

Jehovah Shammah:

The God who is always there, actively present with us

He is my stronghold in times of trouble.

All: He is the forgiving God, who blots out our sins.

And He is my Redeemer, the One who saves me.

(The Hebrew names above were translated in the English that followed. In addition, "El" means "the Deity", God in the power and distinctiveness of His Divine nature. "Yahweh" and "Jehovah" comes from a verb which means "to exist, be." This, plus its usage, shows that this names stresses God as the independent and self-existent God of revelation and redemption.)

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