

Exploring prayer I



Way In

Prayer is perhaps the chief of the spiritual practices. It is woven into all of the other practices in some way – we pray and fast; we pray as we read Scripture; we pray at the Lord’s table; and we pray in fellowship with our Christian family. Prayer is so important that we will take two sessions to think about it. In this first session we will think about prayer as the place where we meet God.



Connect: Share with the group

1. If someone gave you £50, what would you do with it?
2. What have you done in terms of your ‘action point’ from the last meeting?
3. Where is your favourite place to pray? What makes it special?



Contemplate

1. Start with quiet. Ask each person to think of the ‘name’ of God that means most to them (eg Shepherd, Saviour, Rock, Father).
2. Ask those who want to, to share their ‘name’ with the group.
3. Pray this prayer as a group, inserting the chosen names:

God who gathers us, to meet with us, and speak with us, we welcome you by name [speak the names chosen by the group]. Amen.



Consider 1: Read Scripture

And when you pray, you mustn’t be like the play-actors. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners, so that people will notice them. I’m telling you the truth, they have their reward in full. No: when you pray, go into your own room, shut the door, and pray to your father who is there in secret. And your father, who sees in secret, will repay you.

When you pray, don’t pile up a jumbled heap of words! That’s what the Gentiles do. They reckon that the more they say, the more likely they are to be heard. So don’t be like them. You see, your father knows what you need before you ask him. So this is how you should pray: Our father in heaven...

(Matthew 6:5-9) NTW

When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened to him, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased”.

(Luke 3:21-22) NIV

About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.

(Luke 9:28-29) TNIV

Wesley’s wisdom

Prayer is the lifting up of the heart to God: all words of prayer without this are mere hypocrisy. Whenever therefore you attempt to pray, see that it be your one design to commune with God, to lift up your heart to him, to pour out your soul before him...

Our prayers are the proper test of our desires: nothing being fit to have a place in our desires which is not fit to have a place in our prayers. What we may not pray for, neither should we desire.

(John Wesley: Sermon on ‘Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount’ – Discourse VI)



Consider 2: More about

- The Gospels contain many instances of Jesus praying, and also of his teaching on prayer.
- Jesus encourages us to understand prayer as a place where we have a personal encounter with a personal God – one who we can call ‘father’.


- Before prayer is about 'asking', it is therefore about 'meeting'. We pray not only because we want *something*, but also because we desire to be with *someone*.
- In prayer we 'see' God more clearly, hear God's voice and sense God's presence.
- To enter into this kind of prayer we need to 'pause in the presence'. We mustn't rush to our lists before we have met with our Lord.
- Ways to 'lift up our heart' or 'commune with God' (to use Wesley's words), could mean starting our prayer time with worship, listening to praise songs perhaps, or sitting in silence to centre ourselves in God's presence.
- Such prayer works best in a quiet place, where we can 'shut the door' on the busy-ness of life to pay attention to the God who awaits us there.


(for more on Prayer, see the articles on the Methodist Church website www.methodist.org.uk/deepeningdiscipleship)





Consider 3: Your response

Spend a moment in quiet, considering your own response to the readings. You might like to jot down your thoughts in the following boxes.

 What new thing have I seen about prayer?

 What puzzles me about meeting God in prayer?

 What encourages me to reach out to God in prayer?

 In what way would spending more time in prayer help me walk with Jesus?



Consider 4: Sharing wisdom

Now share your thoughts, questions and insights together in the group.

- Take it in turns to share something from your personal reflection.
- Listen to one another carefully.
- Discuss the issues raised, sharing your knowledge, experience and wisdom together.
- Aim to help one another find out what you are each learning about the importance of the spiritual practices in following Jesus.



Commit 1: Reflect


Take a few moments to sit in silence together, reflecting on this session. How is God asking you to respond as an individual? These questions might help you think through your response:

- Do I desire to meet with God in prayer? Where do I find I meet God most easily?
- How could I find time to spend more time alone with God in prayer?
- How might I become more aware of 'centring myself' in God's presence?
- Is there a particular place where I find it easy to be aware of God's presence?



Commit 2: Focus

Write one thing in the box below that you would like to take away from this session, either to do, or to think and pray about further.

 **MY ACTION POINT:** In response to this session on prayer, before the next meeting I would like to...



Commit 3: Pray

Lord Jesus, our desire is to know you, to serve you, and to love you more deeply. Help us as we seek to deepen our discipleship this week. Amen.