

## session 1 study guide

# what is prayer?

### starter

WHAT'S BLOCKING YOUR PRAYER LIFE? Below is a list of potential prayer blockers. How often does each stand in the way of great communication with God?

|                                | Often                    | Sometimes                | Seldom                   |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Lack of discipline             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Not making prayer a priority   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Falling asleep while praying   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hectic schedule                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Don't feel God's presence      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Guilt                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lack of faith God is listening | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Doubting His existence         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Selfishness                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Frustration in prayer          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Daydreaming                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

What are the top three blockers in your life?

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Keep track of this list—today’s Bible study will help you face down your blockers during the next week.

## message

Before we do anything, it’s a good idea to know exactly what it is we want to do. (You wouldn’t try cave diving without knowing what it is first, right?) So, what is prayer? Simple: *Prayer is communicating with God*. Here’s the not-so-simple part: Just like communicating with other people, there are rules of the road that make communicating with God more effective. Learning these guidelines will help you open the line with Him and keep it open. Rich, deep and effective prayer contains five elements:

1. Praise
2. Thanksgiving
3. Confession
4. Asking
5. Listening

1. These elements come straight from God’s Word. Read each of the verses below. Which of the five elements of prayer do you find in the verse?

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9).

Element of prayer:

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*Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:18).*

Element of prayer:

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*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you (Matthew 7:7).*

Element of prayer:

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*I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High (Psalm 9:1-2).*

Element of prayer:

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*Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" (Mark 9:7).*

Element of prayer:

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2. For each of the five elements, (1) write a definition, (2) describe why it is important, and (3) write a short prayer that demonstrates that element.

## **Praise**

Definition:

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Why it's important:

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Prayer of praise:

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## **Thanksgiving**

Definition:

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Why it's important:

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Prayer of thanksgiving:

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## Confession

Definition:

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Why it's important:

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Prayer of confession:

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## Asking

Definition:

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Why it's important:

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Prayer of asking:

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## Listening

Definition:

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Why it's important:

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Prayer of listening:

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3. Are all five elements of prayer necessary for a well-rounded prayer life? Why or why not?

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4. Which element(s) of prayer do you need to emphasize in your life right now? Why?

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### **dig**

One really good reason to incorporate all five elements of prayer into our daily conversations with God is the all-too-human tendency to treat Him like a vending machine: Put your prayer in the slot and out comes a prize! God wants us to ask for what we need . . . but what does that mean, exactly?

Regina Hammond, a 37-year-old flight attendant, won \$100,000 in a Colorado lottery game, on top of \$50,000 she won the previous year the same way. And she's not finished yet. Her goal is the \$1 million grand prize.

Hammond believes that prayer has paved her way to riches. "I pray to God to help me and He answers," she says.<sup>1</sup>

1. Do you think Regina Hammond will win the million dollars? Why or why not?

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2. How do you feel about Regina's claim that she is rich because of prayer?

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3. If prayer works, why don't all lottery players pray and win?

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4. Should people pray to get rich? To win sports events? To be successful? Explain.

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5. Some people feel lotteries are sinful and should be illegal. If that's true, why would God answer Regina's prayers to win?

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6. Would you pray to win a lottery? Why or why not?

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7. Check the items that you would feel comfortable asking God for:

- ☐ An A on a test
- ☐ Lots of money
- ☐ Getting a job
- ☐ A better complexion
- ☐ Winning a game
- ☐ New clothes
- ☐ Not to get caught drinking
- ☐ Getting a date
- ☐ Losing or gaining weight

8. Why is it okay to pray for the items you checked, as opposed to the other things? What's the difference?

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### apply

Prayer gives us the opportunity to share our lives with God, just like talking with friends and family allows us to share our lives with them. When we are in communication with God, we begin to see Him at work in our lives, shaping us into the people He wants us to be. The flipside is that failing to communicate with God often shuts the door to His work in our lives.

Even with loads of knowledge about the subject of prayer, the truth of the matter is that the only way to improve communication with God is *to pray*. But praying can be intimidating until you've had some practice.

1. Name three ways that prayer can bring you closer to God.

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2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. How is prayer different from a face-to-face conversation?

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3. Do you think the five elements of prayer can help you communicate with God more like you communicate in a face-to-face conversation? Why or why not?

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4. How can prayer be a dialogue with God rather than just a monologue?

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5. Do you hear from God in prayer? If so, how does He speak to you? If not, how can you can listen for His voice?

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### **reflect**

1. Read each of the following situations, and then consider ways the person can overcome his or her prayer blocker.

Situation 1: Jayden wants to spend more time in prayer, but he doesn't know how to fit one more thing in his crazy schedule. Between early-morning band rehearsal, after-school tennis practice and homework, the only time he can think to pray is just before he goes to bed. The problem: He keeps nodding off mid-prayer. What can Jayden do?

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Situation 2: Marcie and Dana decide that a great way to pray regularly is to pray together, so they make an appointment to video chat every morning for prayer. More often than not, however, Marcie and Dana find themselves chatting with each other more than with God. What are some ways they can stay focused on God instead of themselves?

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Situation 3: When Stu prays, he spends most of the time begging God's forgiveness for not praying enough. He feels bad about praying so rarely . . . and his guilt makes him want to pray even less! How can Stu get out of this vicious cycle and get on with praying?

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2. Remember your top three prayer blockers from this session's starter? Write them below.

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2. 

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3. 

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3. Write your personal “situation” for each of your top three blockers (use the stories in question 1 as examples).

Situation 1:

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Situation 2:

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Situation 3:

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4. Now give yourself some good advice. As you did for other people's situations in question 1, figure out a way to overcome each of your blockers.

Situation 1:

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Situation 2:

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Situation 3:

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Are you prepared to overcome your blockers and practice praying this week? To get started, find a partner or a small group and pray together. Don't forget to pray each of the five elements: (1) praise, (2) thanksgiving, (3) confession, (4) asking, and (5) listening.

## meditation



In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice;  
in the morning I lay my requests before you  
and wait in expectation.

PSALM 5:3

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### Note

1. Adapted from "Woman Says Prayer Helped Her Win Lottery," *Headline News Discussion Starters* (Loveland, CO: Group, 1990), pp. 30-31. Used by permission.