

Improving Your Growth Group Prayer Times

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Introduction: Improving Your Growth Group Prayer Times

In our Growth Groups, we regularly communicate the importance of a healthy rhythm in your meetings. For instance, in a given month, we encourage groups to spend the 4 weeks in that month with a rhythm of 1) study, 2) prayer, 3) study, 4) fellowship. I want to take some time to talk about the week of growth group that is specifically devoted to prayer.

For me, prayer night is one of the hardest to manage. If you are not careful, share time that leads up to prayer can end up going in a thousand different directions, and for 50 minutes, and then you have no time to pray, and no clue what to pray about. Surely, that is unhelpful for everyone.

Moreover, it is easy for share and prayer time to lead us in many ways away from Biblical prayer. This is not to say that we should not pray for specific needs and requests from our group; but it is to say that it would be wrong if we only prayed thus.

Trying to get out in front of this, and in an attempt to help train and shape the prayer lives of the members of my growth group, I have sought to come into our combined group prayer times with a specific plan each night that keeps us on task, that helps us to pray more consistently along Biblical lines, and to pray outside of ourselves and our felt needs. I believe that this has resulted in maturation in our group's prayer, both in our communal life and in our individual lives. This scheduled, planned prayer has helped to cultivate the habit of prayer.

In addition, I know that many groups use some of their prayer nights to divide up into same-gender groups for confession, sharing of more specific struggles, and prayer. That is also an excellent practice. For instance, every other prayer night (so every other month), we use our prayer night to divide out guys and girls for prayer. So one month, it is a combined prayer night with the whole group, but the next month it is a divided prayer night with guys and girls meeting separately. But even in those separated nights, I have learned that a plan is necessary, or things can get pretty sidetracked. Simply leading off with the question, "What sins do you need to confess?" does not always immediately illicit the greatest response.

My hope is that this document will give you a few different plans that you can utilize for your group's prayer times.

Practicalities to Help Your Prayer Time

Here's a list of things that can help structure your prayer times. Some are purely practical and some are more principle, but the hope is that they both remove distraction and make the most of your prayer times.

-If possible, print a guide for everyone. It helps people from deviating too far. And it really helps to know where they are going. For many of the suggested ways to pray below, I've tried to give you a sample handout that I have used in the past.

-Encourage people to bring their Bibles and use their Bibles as we pray. This is one of the single greatest ways to grow in more well-rounded, Biblical prayer.

-Come up for air. If you are planning to pray through many different things, don't talk about them for 30 minutes, and then pray for 30 minutes. People just can't pay attention that long, especially if they are only doing the verbal praying for 3 minutes of that time. Instead, outline your night so that you talk for 5ish minutes about a topic, and then pray for 3-4 minutes. Then, move on to the next topic for prayer, discuss it, and then pray again.

-Explain to everyone that his or her prayers do not have to be lengthy. Some people are intimidated by long prayers, and therefore won't do it in front of others. Let them know that a 30-second or minute long prayer is fine. And let them know that a 5-minute prayer is probably not fine. I say this almost every week.

-On taking personal requests. In my group, we take prayer requests from each other at the conclusion of every night (study and prayer nights). This is where we keep notes on each other, and learn to pray for things like tests, sicknesses, ongoing issues, or more serious needs, as they arise. We give time for everyone to share who would like to share, and then either I pray, or someone who I know can pray concisely (yet still caringly!). We do this every week, so that people know that the group is a place that they can share and be prayed for.

Method #1 – Pray For Our Church

This method makes all the sense in the world. This is why your group is meeting – because you have all covenanted together as members of the body of Christ Fellowship Church. It makes sense that you would pray for your church as you come together.

Here are some categories to pray through for our church.

-The Church Directory. Take a page or two and pray for each person on it. I recommend taking couples/families together (just a little easier that way). Of course, not everyone will know everyone that they pray for. That is fine, if not great. **The good part is that it can make us pray more Biblical prayers (for their relationship with Christ, for faithfulness in spiritual disciplines, etc.),** rather than praying for their upcoming test or project. Then, the person praying can approach the person prayed for on a Sunday and let them know that they prayed for them at their Growth Group. That is always encouraging. And it helps forge meaningful relationships.

-Elders. Pray for our elders. Read and then pray along 1 Peter 5:1-5. Or 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

- Bart Box
- Ryan Adams
- Lev Bragg
- James Finch
- Nick Murray
- Sam Price
- Duncan Rein
- Jordan Wilbanks

-Global Mission Partners.

- Pray for Clarke in the Middle East.
- Pray for the Bones on their way to Asia
- Pray for Brian and Sara Beth in East Asia
- Pray for the Nichols in Ecuador

-Local ministries.

- Pray for Restoration Academy
- Pray for the Alabama Baptist Children's Home
- Pray for Brother Bryan
- Pray for Sav-A-Life
- Pray for our International Student Ministry (Friendship Partners).

Method #2 – Pray the Church Covenant

This one is a slam-dunk. It's very easy to do, and the way that our covenant is structured, it lends itself to this very well. I would recommend printing the covenant for everyone, including the footnoted Scripture references (see Appendix 1 on the next page). You can take the covenant and run with it any direction you'd like. You can do that extemporaneously. Or, you can create a list of your own from the covenant. Here's an example.

- 1) (Taken from first paragraph of covenant) Thank God for the Gospel that has come to us all. And pray that new believers would be added to our church, and be baptized (Acts 2:38-41).
- 2) (Taken from second paragraph of covenant) Pray for our worship services. Pray that we would come ready each week, for those who plan the services, for the preaching of God's Word, for our obedience and response to what we hear.
- 3) (Taken from third paragraph of covenant) Pray that we would hold fast to the hope that we profess.
- 4) (Taken from fourth paragraph of covenant) Pray that we would do all of the "one another's." Pray that we would spur one another on to love and good deeds, that we would be consistent in meeting with one another, that we would pray for one another regularly, that we would serve one another selflessly.
- 5) (Taken from fourth paragraph of covenant) Pray that God would use our money and witness to spread the gospel among the nations.
- 6) (Taken from fifth paragraph of covenant) Pray for our elders and deacons. Pray that our elders would lead and shepherd well. Pray that our deacons would continue serving faithfully in their positions.
- 7) (Taken from sixth paragraph of covenant) Pray for those who are moving from CFC, either to a new city, or a different church in our city. Pray that they would leave well, not create division, and quickly plug into their new church home.
- 8) (Taken from seventh paragraph of covenant) Pray 2 Corinthians 13:14 – "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all."

Appendix 1: Christ Fellowship Church Covenant

Having been brought by divine grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christⁱ and to surrender our lives to Him,ⁱⁱ and having been baptized upon our profession of faith in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit,ⁱⁱⁱ we do now solemnly and joyfully affirm this covenant with one another by God's grace, for our good, and ultimately for God's glory.

Together, we will draw near to God in worship.^{iv} We will delight in the glory of God,^v depend on the presence of God,^{vi} grow in the knowledge of God,^{vii} and submit to the Word of God as the all-sufficient authority in our lives and in His church.^{viii}

Together, we will hold fast to the hope we profess.^{ix} We will regularly participate in communion as we solemnly and joyfully remember the past work of Christ on the cross, celebrate the present work of Christ at the Father's right hand, and anticipate the future work of Christ in His return for His bride.^x

Together, we will spur one another on to love and good deeds.^{xi} We will meet with one another consistently,^{xii} pray for one another regularly,^{xiii} and serve one another selflessly.^{xiv} We will share each other's joys and bear each other's burdens.^{xv} We will edify one another with our speech^{xvi} and encourage one another with our example.^{xvii} We will humbly and gently confront one another and receive correction from one another in accordance with a New Testament understanding of church discipline and restoration.^{xviii} We will give cheerfully and generously to the support of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.^{xix}

We will submit to the leadership of elders who have been entrusted by God to serve and care for this body by teaching the Word of Christ to us and modeling the character of Christ before us, and we will affirm deacons as leading servants in the church.^{xx}

And if we move from this local body, we will as soon as possible unite with another local church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.^{xxi}

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.^{xxii}

Amen.

Scripture References

ⁱ Acts 2:38; 16:31; 20:21; Romans 10:9-10

ⁱⁱ Luke 14:25-33

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:41; Romans 6:1-4

^{iv} Hebrews 10:22; Romans 12:1-2

^v Psalm 16:11; 37:4; 63:1-11; 1 Corinthians 10:31

^{vi} Exodus 33:14-18; Matthew 28:20; John 15:5; James 4:8

^{vii} Philippians 3:10; Colossians 1:9-12; 2 Peter 3:17-18

^{viii} 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Psalm 19:7-11; 119:105-112; 2 Timothy 4:2-4

^{ix} Hebrews 10:23

^x Luke 22:7-23; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32

^{xi} Hebrews 10:24 ^{xii} Hebrews 10:25

^{xiii} Philippians 1:3-6

^{xiv} Romans 12:9-13

^{xv} 1 Corinthians 12:26; 2 Corinthians 2:3; Galatians 6:2

^{xvi} Ephesians 4:29-32

^{xvii} 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1; Philippians 4:9

^{xviii} Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Galatians 6:1

^{xix} 2 Corinthians 8-9

^{xx} Hebrews 13:17; Acts 6:1-7; 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 5:17-20; 1 Peter 5:1-4

^{xxi} Hebrews 10:25

^{xxii} 2 Corinthians 13:14

Method #3 – Pray the Seven Petitions of the Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) has historically been broken down into seven petitions, which obviously flow right out of prayer.

A simple way to pray at Growth Group is to take those seven petitions and pray accordingly. Move through the petitions, taking one at a time. Discuss it for a couple of minutes, and ask others what they think when they think about this petition. Ask things like: What Scriptures come to mind? What in your Bible study or sermon listening lately sheds light on this petition? (The next few pages, Appendix 2, include some notes and experts from Martin Luther's Large Catechism, in which he discusses the Lord's Prayer. They may help you as you prepare on the discussion.)

After a few minutes of discussion on each petition, ask someone to pray according to that petition, even utilizing some of the thoughts that were just brought up by the group. After you have prayed through all seven of the petitions, have the whole group recite the whole Lord's Prayer together at once. This is a great way to close the prayer time, and to draw all of those thoughts together.

- 1) Hallowed be your name.
- 2) Your Kingdom come.
- 3) Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
- 4) Give us this day our daily bread.
- 5) Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
- 6) Lead us not into temptation.
- 7) Deliver us from evil.

Appendix 2: Notes from Martin Luther's Large Catechism (on the Lord's Prayer)

1) Hallowed be your name.

"But what is it to pray that His name may be holy? Is it not holy already? Answer: Yes, it is always holy in its nature, but in our use it is not holy."

"Here now the great need exists for which we ought to be most concerned, that this name have its proper honor, be esteemed holy and sublime as the greatest treasure and sanctuary that we have; and that as godly children we pray that the name of God, which is already holy in heaven, may also be and remain holy with us upon earth and in all the world. But how does it become holy among us? Answer, as plainly as it can be said: When both our doctrine and life are godly and Christian."

"Thus this point is easy and clear if only the language is understood, that to hallow is the same as in our idiom to praise, magnify, and honor both in word and deed."

2) Your Kingdom come.

"Just as the name of God is in itself holy, and we pray nevertheless that it be holy among us, so also His kingdom comes of itself, without our prayer, yet we pray nevertheless that it may come to us, that is, prevail among us and with us, so that we may be a part of those among whom His name is hallowed and His kingdom prospers."

"Therefore we pray here in the first place that this may become effective with us, and that His name be so praised through the holy Word of God and a Christian life that both we who have accepted it may abide and daily grow therein, and that it may gain approbation and adherence among other people and proceed with power throughout the world, that many may find entrance into the Kingdom of Grace, be made partakers of redemption, being led thereto by the Holy Ghost, in order that thus we may all together remain forever in the one kingdom now begun."

"All this is nothing else than saying: Dear Father, we pray, give us first Thy Word, that the Gospel be preached properly throughout the world; and secondly, that it be received in faith, and work and live in us, so that through the Word and the power of the Holy Ghost Thy kingdom may prevail among us, and the kingdom of the devil be put down, that he may have no right or power over us, until at last it shall be utterly destroyed, and sin, death, and hell shall be exterminated, that we may live forever in perfect righteousness and blessedness."

3) Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

"Hence there is just as great need, as in all the others, that we pray without ceasing: 'Dear Father, Thy will be done, not the will of the devil and of our enemies, nor of anything that would persecute and suppress Thy holy Word or hinder Thy kingdom; and grant that we may bear with patience and overcome whatever is to be endured on that account, lest our poor flesh yield or fall away from weakness or sluggishness.'"

4) Give us this day our daily bread.

“Here, now, we consider the poor breadbasket, the necessities of our body and of the temporal life. It is a brief and simple word, but it has a very wide scope. For when you mention and pray for daily bread, you pray for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy daily bread and, on the other hand, against everything which interferes with it. Therefore you must open wide and extend your thoughts not only to the oven or the flour-bin but to the distant field and the entire land, which bears and brings to us daily bread and every sort of sustenance. For if God did not cause it to grow, and bless and preserve it in the field, we could never take bread from the oven or have any to set upon the table.”

“Let this be a very brief explanation and sketch, showing how far this petition extends through all conditions on earth. Of this any one might indeed make a long prayer, and with many words enumerate all the things that are included therein, as that we pray God to give us food and drink, clothing, house, and home, and health of body; also that He cause the grain and fruits of the field to grow and mature well; furthermore, that He help us at home towards good housekeeping, that He give and preserve to us a godly wife, children, and servants, that He cause our work, trade, or whatever we are engaged in to prosper and succeed, favor us with faithful neighbors and good friends, etc. Likewise, that He give to emperors, kings, and all estates, and especially to the rulers of our country and to all counselors, magistrates, and officers, wisdom, strength, and success that they may govern well and vanquish the Turks and all enemies; to subjects and the common people, obedience, peace, and harmony in their life with one another, and on the other hand, that He would preserve us from all sorts of calamity to body and livelihood, as lightning, hail, fire, flood, poison, pestilence, cattle-plague, war and bloodshed, famine, destructive beasts, wicked men, etc. All this it is well to impress upon the simple, namely, that these things come from God, and must be prayed for by us.”

“Behold, thus God wishes to indicate to us how He cares for us in all our need, and faithfully provides also for our temporal support. And although He abundantly grants and preserves these things even to the wicked and knaves, yet He wishes that we pray for them, in order that we may recognize that we receive them from His hand, and may feel His paternal goodness toward us therein.”

5) Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

“Therefore there is here again great need to call upon God and to pray: Dear Father, forgive us our trespasses. Not as though He did not forgive sin without and even before our prayer (for He has given us the Gospel, in which is pure forgiveness before we prayed or ever thought about it). But this is to the intent that we may recognize and accept such forgiveness.”

“But this should serve God's purpose of breaking our pride and keeping us humble. For in case any one should boast of his godliness and despise others, God has reserved this prerogative to Himself, that the person is to consider himself and place this prayer

before his eyes, and he will find that he is no better than others, and that in the presence of God all must lower their plumes, and be glad that they can attain forgiveness. And let no one think that as long as we live here he can reach such a position that he will not need such forgiveness. In short, if God does not forgive without ceasing, we are lost.”

6) Lead us not into temptation.

“Temptation is of three kinds, namely, of the flesh, of the world and of the devil.”

“This, then, is leading us not into temptation, to wit, when He gives us power and strength to resist, the temptation, however, not being taken away or removed. For while we live in the flesh and have the devil about us, no one can escape temptation and allurements; and it cannot be otherwise than that we must endure trials, yea, be engulfed in them; but we pray for this, that we may not fall and be drowned in them.”

“To feel temptation is therefore a far different thing from consenting or yielding to it...For if we did not feel it, it could not be called a temptation. But to consent thereto is when we give it the reins and do not resist or pray against it.”

7) Deliver us from evil.

“Hence you see again how God wishes us to pray to Him also for all the things which affect our bodily interests, so that we seek and expect help nowhere else except in Him. But this matter He has put last; for if we are to be preserved and delivered from all evil, the name of God must first be hallowed in us, His kingdom must be with us, and His will be done. After that He will finally preserve us from sin and shame, and, besides, from everything that may hurt or injure us.”

Method #4 – Pray Paul’s Prayers

One of the first prayer nights I did with my growth group, I printed out on a sheet of paper all of Paul’s lengthy prayers from the epistles. That’s the seven passages below. (See Appendix 3 for a handout with the ESV of all of these texts.)

- Romans 15:5-6, 13
- Ephesians 1:15-23
- Ephesians 3:14-21
- Philippians 1:9-11
- 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
- 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12
- Philemon 4-7

We didn’t do all seven in one night, but took 2 or 3, and spent time reading over them a couple of times, and then praying the same things Paul prayed for the churches for each other and for our church. This is easily reproducible. Just take Paul’s words, reproduce and repeat them as our own, or adapting some of his words to our situation.

If you are really interested in more teaching on Paul’s prayers, then check out D.A. Carson’s *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*.

Appendix 3: Pauline Prayers (ESV)

Romans 15:5-6, 13 - [5] May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, [6] that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.... [13] May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Ephesians 1:15-23 - [15] For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, [16] I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, [17] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, [18] having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, [19] and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might [20] that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, [21] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. [22] And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 3:14-21 - [14] For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. [20] Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, [21] to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Philippians 1:9-11 - [9] And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, [10] so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, [11] filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 - [9] For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, [10] as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? [11] Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, [12] and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, [13] so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12 - [3] We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. [4] Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. [5] This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—[6] since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, [7] and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels [8] in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. [9] They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, [10] when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. [11] To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, [12] so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philemon 4-7 - [4] I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, [5] because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, [6] and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. [7] For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

Method #5 – Luther’s Simple Way to Pray

This is a great way to structure a prayer night. While it helps to structure your prayer time in a Biblical way, it is also instructive to people on how to turn their own Bible reading into prayer. The beauty of this method is that you can use it with any passage of Scripture, whether that is one that you have just taught on the week before in Growth Group, the one that was just preached the Sunday before, or any other passage of your choosing.

This method comes from Martin Luther’s little booklet, *A Simple Way to Pray*. In it, Luther shows that every passage of Scripture can be turned into prayer with a simple four-step formula. For any passage, you examine it in 4 ways.

- 1) Instruction
- 2) Thanksgiving
- 3) Confession
- 4) Prayer/Petition

First of all, you ask what the passage is teaching. This work may have already been done for you if you taught it the week before or heard it preached. Then, you ask what you can give thanks for in the passage. Next, you seek to confess something in yourself that falls short of what is being taught in the passage. Finally, you turn and ask for God’s help with something that you have learned or been challenged with from the passage.

Listen to how Tim Keller explains it:

“After fixing the truth in your mind as instruction, Luther asks what it shows you about the character of God for which you can praise Him, something wrong about yourself for which you can repent, and something that is needed for which you can petition Him.” (Tim Keller, describing Luther’s method, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, 158.)

“In other words, we are thinking through how this text and what it means [*instruction*] leads us to praise and thank God [*thanksgiving*], how it leads us to repent and confess sin [*confession*], and how it prompts us to appeal to God in petition and supplication [*prayer/petition*].” (Keller, 91)

“This allows us to see every text as a school text, a song book, a penitential book, and a prayer book.” (Keller, 92).

Again, this works for any passage in the Bible. Here’s a way you can do it:

- Start by reading the passage several times out loud in the group. Take a minute to pray for help in understanding God’s Word.
- Then, work together through what is being taught. Boil it down to a few truths. (Or, if it is a passage that you had just taught on the week before, or that was just preached on the Sunday before, review the main points of that lesson and sermon).

- Next, turn that teaching immediately into thanksgiving. Take time and let the group offer prayers of thanksgiving for what is revealed in the Word.
- After that, ask people to discuss what can be confessed as sin in light of the teaching of the passage. Lead that immediately into a time of prayers of confession. Let anyone pray who wants to. This can be more generic (especially if in mixed company), or as specific as is suitable.
- After confession, lead the discussion into the petition section. Ask the group for ways in which we ought to use what we have learned to ask for God's help to apply this to our lives, live more faithfully, etc. Then, do just that. Pray for those things as a group.

Method #6 – The ACTS Acrostic

You may have heard of, or even used the ACTS acrostic for prayer before. It seeks to structure prayer in the categories of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication (ACTS). Here's a way that I have used this method before.

I set up each section with a little bit about what would be the focus of each prayer time, either with an explanation or a passage of Scripture. For example, on Adoration, I would talk a little bit about what that means to adore God in our prayer. I might read Psalm 8:1-9 to give a biblical example of just that. And then I would just open it up and let people pray their own prayers of adoration. After it looked that that section was coming to a close (after 3-5 people prayed), I would read a Psalm or a section of a Psalm that fit with that category (because the Psalms are the prayerbook of the Bible!)

When we got to Confession, people just generally confessed their sinfulness, rather than very specific detail. I think it might be best to give that disclaimer up front, that detailed confession is not necessarily expected here (especially if it's your whole group in co-ed fashion). However, if you were to use this to structure your gender-separated prayer time, I would encourage more specific confession.

Thanksgiving is a pretty easy topic as well, but something we do pretty minimally if we are honest. It's always good to use the Word to direct our hearts to regularly pray prayers of thanksgiving.

Finally, Supplication can be prayer requests. In my group, we almost always close with personal prayer requests. One of my goals is to typically always include that portion of prayer time, but also to stress that we want to be sure that praying for our own requests is not the only way that we pray. **As I often say, "It's not wrong to pray for our requests, but it is wrong to only pray for our requests." The ACTS acrostic helps us to do just that: to pray prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and of course, supplication too.**

Below are some texts that you can use to set up each section, and psalms that you can use as the concluding prayer for each section.

Adoration – *Explanation:* Psalm 8:1-9; Psalm 115:1-3

Concluding Psalm: Psalm 145

Confession – *Explanation:* 1 John 1:8-10; Psalm 36:1-2; James 5:16

Concluding Psalm: Psalm 51; Psalm 32:1-5

Thanksgiving – *Explanation:* 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Concluding Psalm: Psalm 118; Psalm 136; Psalm 138

Supplication – *Explanation:* 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Philippians 4:6

Concluding Psalm: Psalm 55 (esp. V.16-19, 22)

Method #7 – Pray a Psalm

Right at the start, I will say that this one could require a little more study and preparation on your end. But, I will also say that this method is by far my favorite method.

If this is something that you are willing to tackle, the next couple of pages (Appendix 4) are a little crash course on why you might want to try this, and a few steps on how to best do this. This was a handout that I made for a past CFC prayer meeting. You are welcome to produce the whole handout in your group, or simply to consult it yourself. The handout has 6 reasons why to do it, 5 steps on how, and then some quotations from Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the importance of praying the Psalms. The handout also contains a small outline of a sample psalm, Psalm 136.

Once you have selected a psalm, walk through the 5 steps together. Try to do all of that together. It will help if you as the leader have done a little groundwork before, even if that is as simple as studying the ESV Study Bible notes and outline of the psalm.

Appendix 4: Handout on Why & How to Pray the Psalms

Why Pray the Psalms

- *That our prayers may be more God-centered (not self-centered).*
- *That our prayers may be more in line with God's heart (not our hearts).*
- *That our prayers may be more biblical.*
- *That our prayers may be less distracted.*
- *That our prayers may be in line with Jesus, the church, and the people of God throughout all generations.*
- *That our prayers may be more oriented to the needs of the church.*
 - The psalms help us to embrace what we may not feel individually or experientially at the moment, but that someone in our congregation certainly feels.

How to Pray the Psalms¹

1. reading, re-reading, then reading again—and again
2. clarifying the text, gaining an understanding of each of the words or phrases that seem puzzling
3. analyzing the structures in the psalm: (a) rational structure, i.e., the flow of ideas; (b) emotional structure, i.e. the flow of emotions evoked in and by the psalm; (c) rhetorical structure
4. achieving a sense of the psalmist's own often complex and changing relationship to God (e.g., calm, joyous, disturbed, turbulent, angry, depressed)
5. making the answering speech of the psalmist one's own, by repeating his words as one's own, adapting his words to one's own situation or doing some of both

Psalm 136 - A Psalm of Thanksgiving

- V. 1-3 – Introduction
- V. 3-9 – Give Thanks to God the Creator
- V. 10-16 – Give Thanks to God the Redeemer
- V. 17-26 – Give Thanks to God the Provider

¹ James W. Sire, *Learning to Pray Through the Psalms* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 13.

Appendix 4 Continued: Handout on Why & How to Pray the Psalms

Selections from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*²

"In the Psalter we learn to pray on the basis of Christ's prayer. The Psalter is the great school of prayer. Here we learn, first, *what prayer means*. It means praying according to the Word of God, on the basis of promises. Christian prayer takes its stand on the solid ground of the revealed Word and has nothing to do with vague, self-seeking vagaries. We pray on the basis of the prayer of the true Man Jesus Christ." (Bonhoeffer, 47)

"Second, we learn from the prayer of the psalms *what we should pray*. Certain as it is that the scope of the prayer of the psalms ranges far beyond the experience of the individual, nevertheless the individual prays in faith the whole prayer of Christ, the prayer of him who was true Man and who alone possesses the full range of experiences expresses in this prayer." (Bonhoeffer, 47)

"Third, the psalms teach us *to pray as a fellowship*. The Body of Christ is praying, and as an individual one acknowledges that his prayer is only a minute fragment of the whole prayer of the Church. He learns to pray the prayer of the Body of Christ. And that lifts him above his personal concerns and allows him to pray selflessly." (Bonhoeffer, 48-49)

"In all our praying there remains only the prayer of Jesus Christ; this alone has the promise of fulfillment and frees us from the vain repetitions of the heathen. *The more deeply we grow into the psalms and the more often we pray them as our own, the more simple and rich will our prayer will become.*" (Bonhoeffer, 50)

Selections from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*³

"The words which come from God become, then, the steps on which we find our way to God." (Bonhoeffer, 12)

"We must ask how we can understand the Psalms as God's Word, and then we shall be able to pray them. It *does not depend*, therefore, on whether the Psalms express adequately *that which we feel* at a given moment in our heart. If we are to pray aright, perhaps it is quite necessary that we pray *contrary* to our own heart. Not what we want to pray is important, but what God wants us to pray. If we were dependent entirely on ourselves, we would probably pray only the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer [our daily bread]. But God wants it otherwise. The richness of the Word of God ought to determine our prayer, not the poverty of our heart.... *This is pure grace, that God tells us how we can speak with Him and have fellowship with Him*.... The Psalms are given to us to this end, that we may learn to pray them in the name of Jesus." (Bonhoeffer, 14-15)

"Whenever the Psalter is abandoned, an incomparable treasure vanishes from the Christian church. With its recovery will come unsuspected power." (Bonhoeffer, 26)

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: HarperCollins, 1954).

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1970).

Method #8 – “What Did the Early Church Pray For?”

This method is adapted from a Desiring God article by John Piper titled “What to Pray For.”

Piper goes through the New Testament looking for all the things that the early church prayed for. I have adapted it into seventeen prayer points and Scripture passages, arranged in three categories: Corporate Ministry of CFC, Individual Ministry of CFC Members, and the Knowledge of God.

Take it section by section, and have someone read the passage for each prayer point, and then pray accordingly.

Corporate Ministry of CFC

- 1) Pray that the gospel would speed ahead and be honored.

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you. (2 Thessalonians 3:1)

- 2) Pray for boldness in proclamation.

Praying at all times in the Spirit . . . and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel. (Ephesians 6:18-19)

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness. (Acts 4:29)

- 3) Pray that God would direct the use of the sword.

Take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. (Ephesians 6:17-18)

- 4) Pray that God would save unbelievers.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. (Romans 10:1)

- 5) Pray for the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:13; cf. Ephesians 3:19)

- 6) Pray for unity and harmony in the ranks.

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:20-21)

Individual Ministry of CFC Members

- 7) Pray that God would complete your good resolves.

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power. (2 Thessalonians 1:11)

- 8) Pray that you would do good works.

[We have not ceased to pray for you that you] walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work. (Colossians 1:10)

- 9) Pray for a mind of discernment.

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. (Philippians 1:9-10)

- 10) Pray for a knowledge of his will.

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (Colossians 1:9)

- 11) Pray for strength and endurance.

[We have not ceased to pray for you to be] strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy. (Colossians 1:11; cf. Ephesians 3:16)

- 12) Pray deeper sense of his power within us.

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers . . . that you may know . . . what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe. (Ephesians 1:16, 18-19)

Knowledge of God

- 13) Pray to know God better.

[We have not ceased to pray for you to be] increasing in the knowledge of God. (Colossians 1:10; cf. Ephesians 1:17)

- 14) Pray for power to comprehend the love of Christ.

I bow my knees before the Father . . . [that you] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge. (Ephesians 3:14, 18-19)

- 15) Pray for a deeper sense of assured hope.

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers . . . that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. (Ephesians 1:16, 18)

- 16) Pray for greater faith.

Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24; cf. Ephesians 3:17)

Method #9 – Guided Gathering of Prayer Requests

This method was perhaps the most fruitful prayer night my growth group has experienced to date. I adapted it from the *Worship Sourcebook's* section on Gathering Prayer Requests. This method allows you to have structure, but also to have some extemporaneous requests by asking questions that members of the group can respond to for prayer. The night is split in two between a time of Praise/Thanksgiving and a time of Petitions. Here is a sample set of questions:

Praise and Thanksgiving

- For which of God's actions or attributes shall we bless Him?
- For which blessings shall we thank God?
- For which aspects of Biblical teaching shall we thank God?

Petitions

- For which ministries shall we pray?
- For which aspects of congregational life shall we pray?
- For which spiritual gifts shall we pray?
- For which personal concerns shall we pray?

I recommend giving out a handout that has these questions printed on it (see a sample handout on the next page, Appendix 5). That way, people can know what's coming and think ahead. Also, leave some space for folks to jot down the things people say. Take time and pray after you discuss each question.

Appendix 5: Gathering Requests

Praise and Thanksgiving

- For which of God's actions or attributes shall we bless Him?
- For which blessings shall we thank God?
- For which aspects of Biblical teaching shall we thank God?

Petitions

- For which ministries shall we pray?
- For which aspects of congregational life shall we pray?
- For which spiritual gifts shall we pray?
- For which personal concerns shall we pray?

Method #10 – Kingdom Prayer

We have done this in my group when multiple members in our group were looking at an international trip in the coming weeks, or when CFC had a trip coming up. We broke the prayers up into four categories, and prayed for each of them.

- 1) Prayers for our global partners on the ground
- 2) Prayers for upcoming CFC trips
- 3) Prayers for individual mission trips (school, medical, family, work)
- 4) Prayers for unreached people groups (on this, joshuaproject.net is a great resource)

This one might require either specific timing (with mission trips coming up), or some more intentional planning on your part (studying and presenting information on some unreached people groups).

Some Suggestions for Gender Separated Prayer Nights

Many of our Growth Groups use some of their prayer nights to divide up into men and women separately for sharing and praying. In my Growth Group, every other prayer night is a gender separated prayer night. For instance, the whole group prayed together through the Lord's Prayer in January, but in February, the men and women met separately to pray.

The main purpose in scheduling separated prayer time is to allow more specific sharing of struggles and confession of sin. All of our groups are intentionally structured to have males and females from various stages of life, but we do not expect all of our young single men to confess specific sins to other women in the church. However, we want to be sure to have clear avenues where confession of sin is possible, and we want to create environments where that is most feasible. Thus, we think it is helpful to have nights of sharing and prayer that separate men and women for the express purpose of bringing sins and struggles into the light and into caring community.

Practically, it helps to have the men and women separated out enough to where one group cannot hear the other talking. If that means meeting in separate rooms of a house, separate floors, or even separate houses altogether, I recommend organizing that. Beyond location, it always helps to have a plan. Without some sort of plan, this night can go in many different directions, and even away from biblical prayer. However, with too strict of a plan, you can run the risk of not giving the space for confession. So here are some suggested ways to help you (or the female counterpart who leads the women's share/confession time) guide that time.

So here are a few loose guidelines to get you started, plus a few important reminders.

- 1) Use the ACTS acrostic. This is from Method #6. This is probably the easiest way to get started on this. You can use all of the same instructions from earlier in the packet.
- 2) Come with some simple, open-ended questions. You don't need a lot of them, maybe just 2-4. The questions can help get people thinking in the right direction. You don't have to force everyone to answer every question, but if you lead the way by answering each one yourself, that will help people dive in. Here are two sets of questions that I used on different nights:

A more sin specific list:

What sin would you like to see put to death in your life?
What spiritual discipline would you like to see better cultivated?
Which fruit of the Spirit do you want to see in greater abundance?
What idols in your life need to be replaced?

A broader sharing of struggles list:

What's going on at work that needs prayer?
What's going on in your family/relationships that needs prayer?
What's going on in your heart that needs prayer?

- 3) Another great method is to take what you have been studying as a group and use it as a way to guide confession. For instance, your group may be studying a book about the gospel and work, so you can guide your sharing and confession time around some of the main points that you have been discussing. Or perhaps you are studying 1 Peter, so you can confess areas of life where you have failed to be holy, or to submit to authority, or to endure under suffering. The benefit of this method is that it directly ties what you have been studying (head) with what's going on in your group's lives (heart). This one will take some more strategic thinking on your end.

With those guidelines, you'll also need to remember a few other things. First of all, you as the leader must be prepared to lead the way. Confession of sin doesn't always come easy. People often need to see it done, and see that your Growth Group is a safe place for it to be done. The leader can really set the tone here. So be prepared to be the lead confessor, at least at first. And for the woman who leads in the women's prayer time, challenge them to do the same. Whether that is your wife or another woman in your group, they will all benefit by seeing someone lead the way in sharing and confession.

Secondly, make this a regular practice. The first time you do this may be a little weird. But push through that. People will get to the point where they come ready to engage if you persist with it. Generally, that means that they are also growing in their understanding of the importance of sharing and confession.

Third, don't be afraid to ask pointed questions on subjects that are either common sin struggles, or sin struggles that have been mentioned in the past. Revisit the issues of pornography or gossip. Bring up anger and lust. This is not to say that you need to single any one person out, but that honesty about sin usually requires more than a one-time getting something off the chest.

Fourth, remember the gospel. Inject gospel hope into these nights. Point people to Jesus. Use Biblical reminders of our assurance of pardon in Christ. Let the gospel be the greatest motivator for confession of sin and pursuit of righteousness.