

Praying Together

In a group for spiritual seekers, praying together can lead to greater spiritual awareness, encourage faith, and help your group to bond. But it can also be seen as threatening to someone who is not ready to participate. How do you help a group become comfortable praying together, getting beyond common fears and experiencing real prayer together? The ideas below will help your group grow in prayer.

SIGNS OF READINESS

After your group gets off the ground, people will begin sharing more about their lives. Difficult circumstances they face will surface. This is a natural time to ask, “Would you mind if we pray about that?”

ICEBREAKERS ABOUT PRAYER

Try one or both of these when introducing prayer to your group:

- What was prayer like for you as a child?
- Few of us are comfortable praying aloud. What, if anything, has helped you overcome the discomfort of praying aloud?

PRAYER STARTERS

1. To overcome the fear of hearing your voice in prayer, ask each person to think of some aspect of today’s study and finish one of these sentences (but also read Tip #4 on the next page):
 - “Thank you God for _____.”
 - “Help me to _____.”
2. If you are using a study guide that ends each discussion with a prayer, pray it aloud together.
3. Pair off and share one thing to pray for each other during the next week. Optional: Pairs can pray together before they leave.
4. Have each person write 1-2 requests on a 3x5 card with their name and phone number on it. Have each person pick a card and pray for the requests during the next week, agreeing to follow up by phone or in person.

SUCCESSFUL GROUP PRAYERS ARE . . .

. . . SHORT

One or two sentences from each person will allow time for all to pray, if they wish.

. . . SIMPLE

Those who have never prayed aloud can offer one simple sentence from the heart. Avoid complicated phrases and a special prayer vocabulary or voice.

. . . SPECIFIC

Written requests, with answers noted and dated, encourage prayer. Be specific—then the group can tell when a prayer is answered! Some groups write requests out at the end of each discussion.

. . . SUITABLE

1. Requests should relate directly to the group member who is sharing the need for prayer. When a person asks for prayer for someone outside the group, make it a habit to refocus the request so that group members are supporting each other in prayer:
 - How can we pray for you in this situation?
 - What do you need mentally, emotionally, spiritually, or physically?
 - You are the person we know and want to support.
2. This is not a time for advice or comments or suggestions, but for prayer!
3. As much as possible, tie the request into the day’s discussion.

. . . SAFE

Keep confidentiality! This will build trust, openness, and security.

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

1. If your group has decided to open each discussion with a short prayer, the question-asker has the option of asking someone else ahead of time to pray. Encourage group members who are uncomfortable with spontaneous prayer to write out a prayer beforehand to read at the beginning of the discussion.
2. Model simple, short prayers.
3. Do not insist that every aspect of each prayer request be covered, but DO pray for at least one aspect of each request.
4. Praying around the circle can put people on the spot and tends to stifle spontaneity and authentic prayer. Encourage everyone to pray at any point during your prayer time.
5. Keep monitoring the time and wrap up the prayer time by covering any request not prayed for that day, then close.
6. Follow up on prayer requests, perhaps over the phone.
7. Do not allow one person to monopolize prayer time. Gently move people along.
8. Suggest low-key requests for the person who can't think of anything to pray for, such as "Pray that I can be supportive (or kind, helpful, encouraging...) with my children (or wife, husband, or friends...) this week."