

On Sunday, March 9, there will be a Sunday Night Live, a church get-together with food, worship, and fun. As a result, some groups will not be meeting next week. Additionally, No groups will be meeting the week of Spring Break, since so many people will be out of town. The following week will be Easter, so no Sunday groups will meet that week, either. Therefore, some of you won't be meeting at your regular time for a month! Be sure to take advantage of the freedom to do some extra stuff together and to practice some of the exercises in this Travel Guide as a group sometime in the next few weeks.

CONVERSATIONS WITH
GOD



In the mean-time, welcome to a new series at Journey Church! For the next three weeks, we are talking about prayer in our series "Conversations With God."

- **How would you describe what prayer is?**

- **Describe your personal prayer life.** (What do you do, what kind of time frames, what do you pray for, etc.)

- **Does your prayer life seem more like a conversation with God or a monologue of wish-list items?**

- **Do you have any tools or aids that help you when you pray?** (A.C.T.S., Praying through Scripture, Prayer Walking, Journaling, etc.)

- In his book, *The Power of Positive Praying*, John Bisagno writes, "Prayer doesn't change God, it changes you."
 - **Discuss this statement.**

 - **Would you describe your prayer life in this way? Why/Why not?**

- **READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**
 - **Does your life reflect a prayerful attitude that is:**
 - **Constantly rejoicing no matter what is going on?**

 - **Praying continually?**

 - **Giving thanks in all circumstances?**

- **What prayer exercise are you planning to add to your routine in the coming weeks to help you attain the kind of life perspective described in Thessalonians?**

Hey Growth Group Leaders!

Please note that at the end of this Leaders' Guide, there are explanations of a few "prayer exercises" that you can share with your Growth Groups to challenge them to deepen their spiritual journey through prayer. I highly suggest that you take some time at the end of your Growth Group time, or as part of the challenge in the last question, to try one or two of these exercises as a group.

CONVERSATIONS WITH
GOD



I also suggest that you try to find a time in the next few weeks to get out as a group and do some prayerwalking somewhere around town.

Please send me some feedback on these exercises. I'd like to know how folks' lives are changed by stepping out in expectant prayer through one of these exercises. Getting some good feedback from you will help Eric and I evaluate how we want to proceed through this series.

Thanks!
Andrew

Before you begin your discussion this week, review the schedule for the next few weeks and plan any outings you can to keep the momentum of your group moving in a positive direction. This is a great time for your group to **get off the couch** and serve somewhere in the community. It's also a chance to **do life together** by having some informal, fun time together doing something you have common interest in.

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In the mean-time, welcome to a new series at Journey Church! For the next three weeks, we are talking about prayer in our series "Conversations With God."

The purpose of this series is to help us understand the importance of prayer in our lives and to help us make practical steps to improve our spiritual focus in prayer. As usual, the first section of questions are focus and diagnostic questions. Use these four questions to evaluate where your group is as a whole, and to decide where to take the rest of the conversation. I believe that you may find that some of your group members are really clueless on how to deepen their prayer lives. Some of your folks probably have never heard of any of the exercises we are suggesting. If this is the case, I would suggest starting with either the *A.C.T.S.* model or the *Praying Through Scripture* model at the end of your discussion.

- **How would you describe what prayer is?**

The first instinct is probably going to be "a conversation with God" or "talking to God" or something similar. Try to get the conversation moving a little deeper than this. The next 3 questions may help, but I suggest you are prepared with a few follow-up questions that will help get a little more out of this question. Some follow-ups may be: "What do you mean by a conversation with God." "A conversation requires talking and listening on both sides. How do you hear and listen to God when you pray?"

These next couple of questions are much more personal and will help you understand how much of a role prayer really plays in each person's life.

- **Describe your personal prayer life.** (What do you do, what kind of time frames, what do you pray for, etc.)
- **Does your prayer life seem more like a conversation with God or a monologue of wish-list items?**
- **Do you have any tools or aids that help you when you pray?** (A.C.T.S., Praying through Scripture, Prayer Walking, Journaling, etc.)

If your folks are clueless on this question, don't be surprised. If they are, tell them we'll come back to this later. I wouldn't take time to describe these tools at this point. I think we need to deepen their understanding of the need to practice some of these before we introduce them . . .

- In his book, *The Power of Positive Praying*, John Bisagno writes, "Prayer doesn't change God, it changes you."
 - **Discuss this statement.**

Definitely be sure to dwell on the idea that God does not change. He is sovereign and ultimately His will is accomplished, even in less than ideal circumstances. With this in mind, we find that the purpose of prayer is to allow God to speak to us and to align our hearts and desires with His.

Often, with this perspective, we will find that when we pray for something, we may not get what we originally ask for, but we find our desires shifting and God shaping us for something better than our original request.

- **Would you describe your prayer life in this way? Why/Why not?**
- **READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

The purpose of looking at this verse is to help us understand the spiritual perspective that a healthy prayer life places into our lives. The only way to have the kind of attitude at work in us is to seek God carefully and often through prayer. Try to move the discussion in a direction where you can set your folks up for a challenge to deepen their prayer life.

If folks are trying to figure out God, encourage them to pray and read their Bibles. If folks are frustrated with something, tell them to ask God for wisdom to deal with the circumstances and peace to make it to the other side. If they are trying to overcome personal struggles, tell them to spend time conversing with God, allowing Him to shape them and conform them into His image, to cleanse them from their unrighteousness. Be creative.

- **Does your life reflect a prayerful attitude that is:**
 - **Constantly rejoicing no matter what is going on?**
 - **Praying continually?**
 - **Giving thanks in all circumstances?**
- **What prayer exercise are you planning to add to your routine in the coming weeks to help you attain the kind of life perspective described in Thessalonians?**

Now is the time to revisit the exercises previously mentioned and explain any that you think would benefit the folks in your group. Each of the following explanations will be available for download on my blog and on my ministry web site for easy access (<http://www.buildingchurch.net/discipline.htm>, click on "Prayer").

I highly suggest that you either take time to try one of the exercises now, or plan a time to do it as a group.

BuildingChurch.net

Spiritual Disciplines: Prayer

A.C.T.S.

This document lays out a simple acrostic to help Christ followers develop a balanced and disciplined prayer life.

Having a personal prayer plan can enhance your prayer experience. In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus teaches believers to pray in a certain way. A plan will provide direction and focus in your prayer life. Our desire should be to encounter the God who answers prayer. Believers should resist the temptation to allow this or any other plan to become a means to an end. Jesus warns against prayer being treated as simply a ritual or religious activity (see Matt. 6:7-8).

As you pray you can use the ACTS acrostic to guide your prayer time. These categories are broad enough to allow for adaptation to individual contexts. This acrostic contains the major elements given by Christ in the model prayer (see Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4).

A - Adoration

Spend time praising the Lord and adoring Him for who he is (Matt. 6:9). Use Scripture to praise Him (see Pss. 103, 145, 150; Rev. 4:8; 5:12-14). Love and cherish His presence and allow Him to work in and through your life (see Matt. 22:32-34). Be still before Him and enjoy His presence (see Ps. 46:10). Use this time to allow God to speak to you through His Word and Spirit (see Pss. 40:1-3; 90:12-17). Praise the Lord by praying scripture or songs back to Him (see Ps. 84; Rev. 4:8; 5:9-10, 12-13 and "Great is Thy Faithfulness").

C - Confession

Confession should be a part of your continual walk with Christ (see Matt. 6:9-13). Spend time asking Christ to search your heart for areas that displease Him (see Ps. 139:23-24). Allow God to cleanse your heart of any unconfessed sin (see Ps. 51:10-13). Be sure to spend time confessing and repenting of (turning away from) specific sins (see 1 John 1:9). Accept His forgiveness and cleansing (see Jer. 31:34).

T - Thanksgiving

Giving thanks for all things should be a part of our everyday lives as God's people (see Phil. 4:6-7). This includes thanking God for specific things such as blessings, people, open doors, guidance, etc. Also give thanks for His salvation and the privilege to serve such a wonderful Savior. Thank Him for his goodness, loving-kindness, and faithfulness (see Ps. 100:4-6).

S - Supplication

We are called as believers to intercessory prayer (see Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 18:1; Col. 4:2; 1 Tim. 2:1-4). Thus, we are to come before God on behalf of others (see Heb. 10:19-25; Rev. 1:4-6). Spend time praying for specific people, events, states, countries, missionaries, etc. (see Acts 12:5; Rom. 10:1). In addition, spend time praying for personal needs (see Matt. 6:11-13). Make prayer lists for your time of supplication. Be sure to include a place for answers to be recorded. Recorded answers can become items for praise and thanksgiving.

This information is adapted from: http://www.crcmin.org/prayerguide/acts_acrostic.htm, March 1, 2008.

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Spiritual Disciplines: Prayer

Praying Through Scripture

Sometimes we are stuck and simply do not know what to pray for. A great solution is to pray through a passage in the Bible. Also, praying through the truths of the Bible help us to know that we are praying the mind of God. As we pray through scripture, God has the opportunity to shape our thoughts to match His thoughts.

The Psalms are a very rich source of scripture for use in prayer. Any significant passage that contains a prayer is also a good source for praying scripture. Occasionally, praying through a doctrinal passage in the New Testament letters can be helpful to internalize truth to your life.

Praying through scripture can take two simple forms:

1. *Directly praying the words of the Bible.*

This option simply takes the words in the Bible passage and slowly read and meditate on them as you pray them to God.

2. *Using the words of the Bible as a catalyst to expand and shape your prayers.*

In this option, you read a phrase, verse or short passage, meditate on it, and pray the thought back to God in your own words. Often, God may bring a thought to mind that applies the particular truth to your current circumstances, which allows you then to pray for that circumstance.

An example of the second form, from *Psalm 25:1-3 (ESV)*:

This is only a sample. I do not suggest praying through only a few verses. Often, if we limit ourselves to a few verses, we will miss a truth that God has for us in response to our situation. When we pray through a larger passage, we may begin with a prayer from our perspective of our circumstances, but God may shift our view to where He wants us to be.

“To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.”

Lord, God, I take this moment to step back from my life and focus on you. I worship you in this moment. I honor you because you are my salvation and the keeper of my soul. I lay myself before you, for you are my God.

“O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.”

God, I can't make it on my own. I trust in you. Anything that happens to me reflects on you. I believe that you have promised to take care of me. If you do not, it is your name on the line. I pray that you would protect me from those that want to harm me. God, do not give them an opportunity to laugh at me on your account.

“Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.”

There is your promise, God. You will protect me. Protect me in this time of distress. Please give me the strength to wait for you. If I wait for you, you will not allow my enemies to laugh at me. Keep me from getting ahead of you in this situation. Do not allow me to be careless about my faith. Do not allow me to move forward without carefully considering your heart. I know you will protect me when I am doing your will in your time. Please keep me on the right path and at the right time, so that you can demonstrate your care and concern for me without me being ashamed.

And so on . . .

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Spiritual Disciplines: Prayer

Prayer Walking

Prayerwalking is simply praying in the very places we expect God to bring forth His answers.

What is Prayerwalking?

Prayerwalking is praying on-site with insight. It is more than enjoying personal communion with God while walking. Prayerwalking is focused intercession. As desirable as outdoor devotions may be, the term “prayerwalking” should be reserved for on-site prayers for others.

Prayerwalking is intentional prayer. The value of physical exercise is merely a side benefit to the main focus of intercessory prayer for those in your prayerwalking area. Walk in order to pray instead of merely adding prayer to a regimen of walking.

Prayerwalking is strolling through neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces, praying as we go. There are some occasions when the prayer should be demonstrative, but usually it’s being on the scene without making a scene. Though they usually walk unnoticed, prayerwalkers quickly become aware of the realities and needs of their neighbors.

Prayerwalking is not ‘magic.’ The power to effect change within our cities through prayer comes via the personal and corporate commitment to live in such a manner that our lives are the vehicles through which God can work.

Instructions for Prayerwalking:

- Seek to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as you pray.
- Pray with your spiritual eyes open. As you walk down a street, ask that God would help you see the neighborhood from His perspective. Pray specifically for people you see and things you pass. This is called praying on-site with insight.
- Keep your prayers centered on blessing and binding. Seek to bless every block, homes, and business as you pray for their well being. The greatest blessing is that individuals come to know the hope and life that Jesus offers. We will seek to bring the enemy’s activity over these neighborhoods as we take authority in Jesus’ name and take a stand against the enemy’s schemes. Always remember: *we bless people and we bind the evil spirits.*
- Pray over any houses that are for sale or empty that God may fill them with his righteous individuals or people that are spiritually hungry.
- Pray for bars or liquor stores if nearby . . . bind the spirits that would seek to entrap people. Seek opportunities to pray over the owners, managers, and leaders, asking the Lord to bless them with spiritual revelation. Many of these individuals do not have much contact with Christians, much less with Christians that are seeking to bless them.
- Pray for Christians that may already live in the area that their witness will be strong and their love will be evident to their neighbors.
- Pray over any church you may walk by. If they are a church that teaches the Gospel, pray that they would grow and impact their community. If they do not preach the Gospel, then pray that the church leaders would come to the saving knowledge of Christ.

Prayerwalking Suggestions:

- Find someone like-minded to prayerwalk with. You may commit to prayerwalk together once or twice a week for a specified number of weeks or months.
- If you already walk to exercise, why not turn it into a prayerwalking time. Instead of walking the same course you could vary the streets you walk on to fully cover a given area.
- Consider making up a 3x5 card (or two) of Scriptures that may be helpful and carrying it with you as you prayerwalk. If you get short on ideas of what to pray for, pray through one of these verses and use it to spark thoughts of what to pray for.
- Be friendly to people you see. If they spark up a conversation, introduce yourself, tell them you are simply praying for their neighborhood, ask them if they have any specific requests, pray simply and quickly for their requests, and calmly move on. Don't try to preach at them unless the Holy Spirit prompts you of a divine appointment.
- Carry invite cards to your church to hand out when friendly conversations with disconnected people occur.

A Prayerwalking Story:

David Haskell was in his second year at the University of Oregon in 1979. He and his buddy, Jim, were eating hamburgers at McDonald's, discussing what impossible thing they could believe God for. Dave suggested ". . . that every student on campus hears the Gospel this year." There were 17,000 students, and they knew of 65 Christians on campus. "Now THAT would be impossible," exclaimed Jim.

They divided a university map into seven parts and spent 20-30 minutes a day walking around the designated territory for that day, asking God to do what He had promised Joshua: "I will give you every place where you set your foot" (Joshua 1:2-4). Even in the pouring rain, they walked, carrying umbrellas.

For everyone to hear the Gospel, each person had to be exposed to a believer, thought Dave and Jim. So as they walked around dormitories and fraternities, they asked God to place a Christian on every floor. There were 149 floors. Walking around each of the academic departments, they prayed for a believer in each place.

After two months, Dave thought, "this is the most ludicrous thing I have ever done in my life. If God does not answer prayer, what a waste of time." But they prayed on until spring, four months in all.

Then Josh McDowell, who has spoken about Christ at countless universities, spoke several times on campus at the invitation of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Thousands heard him. Jesus became the big topic of conversation for a week. Afterwards, although they were not evenly spread over the dormitory floors, there were over 149 new Christians. Every student had a chance to hear the Gospel.

Several years later, the University of Oregon was the most fruitful university ministries of The Navigators in the northwest U.S.A. A few years before Dave and Jim's walks, Campus Crusade, InterVarsity, and The Navigators had all considered terminating their ministries there for lack of results.

Dave later transferred to Wheaton College and then went on to be a missionary in Beirut, Lebanon. In both locations, he began prayer walking teams and experienced miraculous results. Are you walking through your city, praying for God to do impossible things?

The information contained in this document is adapted from these and other miscellaneous sources, including some copyrighted material.

Prayerwalking: Praying On Site With Insight, By Steven Hawthorne and Graham Kendrick, Creation House, 2003.

Prayerwalking: A New Approach to Spiritual Warfare, by Graham Kendrick and John Houghton, Kingsway Publications, 1990.

Participatory Missionary Prayer Manual, by John Huffman, Christ for the City, Intl.