



PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Leader's Guide

GOAL:

As a group, experience a meaningful time of extended prayer that focuses on our spiritual transformation

OPENING TO GOD (5-8 minutes)

Have different people read these passages out loud with a short pause (a few seconds) between each (arrange this before you start so that everyone knows what to do); think of it as a “cascade of Scripture” pouring over you together.

- ◇ Psalm 100:4-5 “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”
- ◇ Ephesians 1:3 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”
- ◇ Psalm 138:3 “On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.”
- ◇ Psalm 9:1-2 “I will praise you, Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.”
- ◇ Psalm 42:1-2 “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”
- ◇ Psalm 143:8 “Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life.”
- ◇ Psalm 73:25-26 “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

DEEPLY ROOTED: PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Now, invite your group into a time of prayer focused on thanksgiving and praise as well as surrendering this time together to his purposes.

- ◇ You might have everyone first pray silently for a minute or two,
- ◇ Then invite anyone who would like to voice sentence prayers aloud (popcorn fashion). Say that it is OK for people to pray more than once. The purpose is to open ourselves to God together.

Close the segment with your own prayer or just “amen.”

LISTENING TO GOD THROUGH SCRIPTURE (8-10 minutes)

Explain that we are now going to listen to a prayer of Paul’s read 3 times; as it is read, invite them to listen for the word or phrase that resonates in their spirit right now. Encourage them to underline or circle words in the text or jot a thought in the margin.

Read this passage slowly (and with expression) 3 times with 10 or 15 secs of silence between each repetition:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

Next, invite everyone to pray silently, responding to God about what they have heard in this passage from Colossians. Encourage them to jot anything down that will help them articulate and remember what they have heard and felt.

Close the time of silent prayer with “amen.”

PRAYING FOR ONE ANOTHER (10-12 minutes)

Divide into smaller groups of 3; if your group is less than 10, you might prefer to stay all together.

Invite everyone to think of one aspect of how they desire God to help them grow in this season; this may have been prompted by their Deeply Rooted reading in the past few weeks; or it may be something that's been on their mind for a while; or it may be something that was prompted by the Scripture this evening. Give them some time to think specifically as to what this desire is and jot it down.

After this time of reflection, invite everyone to share with their group at whatever level they are comfortable.

Now pray for each other concerning these desires. If you divided into small groups, everyone can pray for those they listened to, or just one person in each group can pray for all. If you have stayed in a larger group, have everyone pray silently for the person on their right for a minute or two, then you as the leader can voice a closing prayer.

PRAYING FOR OUR CHURCH (5-8 minutes)

Come back together if you divided into small groups for the previous segment.

Explain that we will now shift our focus from individual to corporate and spend some time praying for our transformation together as the family of Valley Ranch Baptist Church, so that we might be the kind of people God wants us to be for the sake of his glory and purposes.

Have two people read these two passages:

Matthew 5:13-16 (MSG) “Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. . . . You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand – shine!

PRAYING FOR OUR CHURCH (continued)

Philippians 2:1-4 “Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of self-ambition or vain conceit. Rather in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others.”

Invite anyone who is comfortable to pray these scriptures back to God, asking God to transform us and mold us as the people of VRBC, that we might continue to become the kind of people who live out his mission faithfully.

When you feel this time of prayer is complete, speak this blessing from Hebrews 13 to close this segment: “Now may the God of peace . . . equip us with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (Hebrews 13:20-21)

DEBRIEFING (8-10 MINUTES)

If you have time, here are some questions to help your group debrief what they experienced together and reflect on what it teaches them about praying in community.

- ◇ What part of this experience was most meaningful?
- ◇ Which segment(s) caused you to pray in a way that is new for you?
- ◇ What can you take away from this experience that might help you in your own prayer life or that you would like the group to practice more?

TIPS FOR LEADERS

- You are certainly welcome to modify this guide so that it is most helpful to your group having a great time of prayer together.
- Several things in this guide were intentional that we hope you will embrace:
 - o We want to spend a good portion of our time actually praying, rather than just talking about prayer. Some may not be accustomed to this lengthy of a prayer experience, but encourage them to press through! We hope the design will keep it comfortable and accessible for all.
 - o The focus of this prayer experience is our spiritual growth. We tend to be comfortable interceding for one another concerning a variety of needs, but this focus is less common. We want to help people deepen their experience of this kind of prayer and to learn to pray consistently for each other's lives with God.
 - o There are a few opportunities for silence, reflection and listening prayer. Again, these may be less familiar, but we hope you will help your group "dip their toe" into something new in order to deepen their experience of prayer.
 - o We depend on Scripture to guide our prayer; it's always beneficial to learn how to pray according to Scripture, which is why we have provided some passages for this experience.
- You know your group best when it comes to how comfortable they are praying aloud in a group. This guide provides opportunities for silent prayer, as "popcorn" prayer of just a word of phrase or sentence. We hope this style of prayer will help some feel they can also pray out loud without the need to "make a speech." There are also opportunities for those who are more comfortable to voice slightly longer prayers.
- Try not to be anxious about allowing some silence in between during the segments where people pray out loud. We usually feel the pressure to "wrap it up" if things are quiet. Prepare your group to be OK with quiet and to relax into this unhurried time with God and each other.
- Another suggestion might be to pay attention to the environment for the prayer experience: making it comfortable for 45 minutes, perhaps having some kind of soft, instrumental music in the background – whatever might help your group feel at ease while also keeping it simple.
- Everyone will need the participant's guide and something to write with.
- Thanks so much for stretching your group (and yourself) in this important area. We appreciate you!