

# *Ways to Pray*

## in the Old Testament and Today



"New Roots (Encouraging the Israelites in Exile to Plant Gardens & Build Houses)"  
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Linked-In Learning • Fall 2023

## *Study Guide*

NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# How to Use this Guide

**E**veryone, leader and participants, should begin by reading the introduction for its important orientation to the theme for this study.

- \* Participants can best prepare for each meeting by reading the assigned text in advance at least once. They can also read the material that will guide the discussion, although this is not necessary to enter into the discussion.
- \* If you are unable to attend a small group or the adult education class, you can use this guide each week to prepare to hear the sermon in worship on Sunday or during the week on the Nassau Church website.
- \* This guide can also help in your preparation for the adult education presentations.
- \* If you didn't sign up for a small group because the times were not convenient, you can gather three or four friends on Zoom to talk about "Ways to Pray" using this guide. Or read the text and discuss the questions together as a family or couple.
- \* Leaders of small groups can prepare by reading the text in advance as well as looking over the discussion plan to see how it will fit your group and the events of the day. For suggestions and reminders about leading small groups in general and this series in particular, turn to page 15 of this guide.

However and whenever you enter into this study, bring your own questions as you grapple with this material and Christian discipleship today. May your faith increase even as you find a new dimension to your relationship with God and your faith journey.



# Introduction

The success of the linked-in adult education series for the past years and the high interest in the faith journeys of members and friends has brought us to another series featuring members and friends of this congregation. This fall we turn to the Old Testament. Presenters were given a list of prayers in the Old Testament and asked to select one as the focus for their presentation, using this prayer to consider their own prayer life.

Hearing from others will, we hope, broaden your prayer life along with your knowledge of how God's people in the Old Testament communicated with God. Prophets, kings, and faithful followers of God with little power or presence all speak to God and wait for a word from God. Their prayers remind us of the importance of acknowledging God's presence in our lives and the time necessary to build this relationship with our Creator.

Each week the preacher will use the Old Testament text as the sermon text. Members of our faith community will guide us in thinking about the text and why it is important to them and might also be important to us and our prayer lives. Some of these texts, such as the Hannah's song to God in 1 Samuel 2, may be familiar to you. Others, such as listening for God in Habakkuk, may not be.

You are encouraged to worship each Sunday with others in the Sanctuary or by watching the live-stream service of worship. A second feature to deepen your understanding of the passage and its place in our worship life is to come to the adult education presentation in the Assembly Room on Sunday mornings. If you cannot be present, listen to the recording later in the week on the church website. Of course, to maximize your experience with this topic and the biblical texts, join a small group to discuss the text and prayers with others. You can sign up at the church during fellowship hour or on the church website. But if none of the times offered fits into your schedule, invite a couple friends to join you over coffee or on Zoom, using this guide as your starting point.

You get the idea; the more you interact with the biblical texts and the types of prayer included in this guide, the richer and more transformational your experience will be during these weeks of linked-in learning. However you are able to enter into these weeks of worship and learning centered on prayers of the Old Testament, may they enrich your own prayers and embolden your faith.



# WEEK ONE

## Daniel Prays Faithfully

Learning what God is like is called prayer. When we pray, we open ourselves to the love that is God, absolutely certain that God will hear us and help us to change. We usually think that praying is talking to God, and so it often is. But even more often it is listening to God, even though we cannot hear words. Instead we shall find ourselves simply knowing what God is like and what we ought to do. God will teach us silently if we are listening.

Sister Wendy Beckett, *A Child's Book of Prayer in Art*, p. 6.

### *Featuring the Bible Text*

Read Daniel 6:10–15.

- \* Who is praying?
- \* What do you know about this person, based on these few verses?
- \* What do you know about Daniel's situation up to this passage? For help, read the introduction to the book of Daniel in a study Bible, or skim Daniel, chapters 1 through 5. How would you summarize Daniel's relationship to the king? Then read Daniel 6:1–9. How is Daniel's reputation and relationship to the king about to change?
- \* What results from Daniel's prayer, in this case, from his practice of praying three times daily?

## *Featuring Prayers at Designated Times*

One way to describe the prayer life that Daniel practiced is fixed-hour prayer. In Jesus' time, faithful Jews prayed at set times each day. Hence, Peter and John were on their way to the temple to pray at three o'clock when they encountered the crippled man. Jews in Jerusalem went to the temple to pray at noon and three o'clock. That practice is expanded in the monasteries and convents where the hours may be several times throughout the day, such as the prayer schedule established by Saint Benedict over 1,000 years ago:

- \* *Vigils* (night prayer)
- \* *Lauds* (when you wake up prayer)
- \* *Prime* (beginning to work prayer)
- \* *Terce* (mid-morning thanks prayer)
- \* *Sext* (noon commitment prayer)
- \* *None* (mid-afternoon prayer)
- \* *Vespers* (evening prayer)
- \* *Compline* (end of day into sleep prayer)

Don't be overwhelmed by this list. If you already have a time of day or night when you usually pray, you might add one more time for prayer. Remember, Daniel only prayed three times each day. If you don't have an established time for prayer, consider one from the list above or select a better time for you.

If you are concerned about what to pray, pray a breath prayer over and over, placing yourself in God's presence. Breathe in and out slowly, repeating two short phrases, such as:

*Creator God, show me your love.*

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill me.*

*Christ Jesus, have mercy on me.*

- \* How might Daniel's practice of daily prayer transform how and when you pray?



# WEEK TWO

## Solomon Prays for Himself

To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ.

Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth*, p. 33.

### *Featuring the Bible Text*

Read 1 Kings 3:4–15.

- \* Who is praying?
- \* What do we know about him from this brief passage? Looking over chapters 1 and 2 may give you more insight into him.
- \* What is the setting for this prayer?
- \* What results from this prayer? The rest of chapter three gives an example of God's answer to his prayer.

## *Featuring Prayers of Self-Examination*

Confession or examination of one's conscience has long been an important element in the prayer life of individuals and communities. God's people have used a variety of materials to make this self-examination: the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 6:6–21), the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–11), and gifts of the Spirit (Colossians 3:12). A popular and centuries-old form of praying this examination is *examen*. Many varieties of this model put forth by Ignatius in the 1500s have been created over the years. This is one that can be done each day, week, or month.

- \* Pray that God's presence and Spirit will be with you. Rejoice in God's love.
- \* Review your day, looking for moments of joy, peace, or a sense that you were in tune with God.
- \* Sit peacefully with these moments and give thanks for them.
- \* Review your day again, looking for moments of difficulty, sadness, frustration, or times when God seemed far away. Think about the feelings that surfaced in recalling those moments. Confess your part in causing or perpetuating those moments.
- \* Ask God to forgive you and to help you do better tomorrow.

Some people find writing their thoughts for each day in a journal and looking for any pattern that might help them discover what is common in moments of joy or in moments of sadness helpful.

- \* Have you tried to examine your life and your relationship with God? How did that go?
- \* Which of these ways seems most appropriate for your life?
- \* How do you think this type of prayer might strengthen your faith journey?



# WEEK THREE

## Solomon Prays for Others

Intercessory prayer invites us into God's care and concern for us, our families and friends, and the entire world. No concern is too trivial for God to receive with loving attention. However, intercession is not a means of manipulating heaven into doing our will. Rather it is a way we become aware of God's prayer for a person and join in that intercession.

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*, p. 258.

### *Featuring the Bible Text*

Read 1 Kings 8:22–53.

- \* This is a second prayer by King Solomon. What does this passage add to our knowledge of him?
- \* How does the setting for this prayer differ from the one in 1 Kings 3:4–15?
- \* What results from this prayer?



## *Featuring Prayers of Intercession*

How we approach praying for others is key to being comfortable with prayers of intercession. We may question whether such prayers make a difference. We may fear that our prayers are unanswered because our faith is too weak. Or, why would we think that we could influence God? Marjorie Thompson writes that “the context for ‘prayers of asking’ is a heart offered to God in gratitude, eager to fulfill divine intent” (*Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, p. 39).

- \* Considering the quote at the top of this week and the one above, how does this information modify, support, or challenge your understanding of intercessory prayer?

Richard Foster offers this thought as we consider praying for others: “Compassion was an evident feature of every healing in the New Testament. We do not pray for people as ‘things,’ but as ‘persons’ whom we love” (*Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, p. 40).

- \* What might an intentional attitude of compassion add to your prayers of intercession?
- \* How do you or might you integrate intercessory prayer into your daily life?

# Reflections

# Prayers



# WEEK FOUR

## Hannah's Prayer Praises God

Q. 1. What is the chief end of humanity?

A. The chief and highest end of humanity is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy God forever.

*Westminster Larger Catechism*

### *Featuring the Bible Text*

Read 1 Samuel 2:1-10

- \* Who is praying? What do we know about this person from these verses?
- \* What is the setting? Read 1 Samuel 1 for an introduction to this prayer.
- \* What results from this prayer? Consider this answer from the four major players in the story thus far: Hannah, Elkanah, Samuel, and Eli.

## *Featuring Prayers Praising God*

The first mnemonic device I learned to remember the types of prayers was ACTS:

Adoration

Confession

Thanksgiving

Supplication

It is fitting that adoration is the first prayer. We need always to give praise and adoration to God as we approach God. Hannah's entire prayer is one of adoration. That is the message from the first question of the Westminster Larger Catechism. We are to glorify God, first and foremost.

\* How do you begin your prayers?

Hannah's prayer is sometimes referred to as a song, as is Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55). The prayers of these two women are often linked.

\* What hymns might provide you with ways to open your prayers by praising God?

\* How might an emphasis on praising God change your prayer life?



# WEEK FIVE

## We Pray in Silence

Though silence sometimes involves the absence of speech, it always involves the act of listening. Simply to refrain from talking, without a heart listening to God, is not silence.

Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, p. 98.

### *Featuring the Bible Text*

Read Habakkuk 2:1.

- \* Who is speaking? What can you discover about this person from this single verse? What do you know about him from reading the first chapter?
- \* What is the setting for this time of silence?
- \* How does it work out for Habakkuk?

## *Featuring Prayers of Silence*

And as the silence settles in and nothing seems to be happening, we often struggle with the feeling that we are wasting time. Everything in this struggle can become an invitation to prayer. Like a can opener, the silence opens up the contents of our heart, allowing us deeper access to God than we experience at other times....The Holy One has access to places we don't even know exist in the midst of the hubbub.

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*, pp. 122– 123.

- \* How is this silence different from simply not speaking?
- \* How do you imagine silence being a part of your prayer life?
- \* How might the inclusion of silence change your prayer life?







# NOTES FOR SMALL GROUPS LEADERS

Leading a small group is not quite the same as leading a Bible study. While the goal of a Bible study or a study of prayer would be to increase biblical knowledge or understanding of prayer, the primary goal for a small group is to deepen relationships among the participants as each one grows in relationship with God and Jesus and as Christ's disciple.

At the first gathering, take time to review the group covenant on the back page of this booklet. It is important that each member of a small group is clear about the guidelines that make for a successful time together. Invite the group to add to the covenant.

## *A simple process for each week could be:*

- \* Ask the opening question (see below).
- \* Prayer.
- \* After the first week, invite comments about the previous sermon or adult education presentation.
- \* Read or invite a group member to read the Bible passage.
- \* Read and discuss the questions in "Featuring the Bible Text."
- \* Read and discuss the questions in "Featuring the Prayers of..."
- \* Call for prayer requests. Although these may not be the focus of the closing prayer, many small groups have found that knowing how they can pray for others between meetings helps to build a stronger community.
- \* Close with prayer as suggested for each week.

## *Opening Questions*

To help the participants become better acquainted, and especially if anyone in your group doesn't know the other participants, invite everyone to answer a question at the beginning of each gathering. This time also helps the group make the transition from what has been occupying their minds to the small group discussion space. A choice of questions is below, but feel free to come up with your own.

### *Week One*

- \* If you were taught a childhood prayer, what was it?
- \* What was the best or worst thing about this summer?

### *Week Two*

- \* How would you answer if someone ask, "How can I pray for you this week?"
- \* November 1 is All Saints Day. Who is a hero/heroine of the faith for you?

### *Week Three*

- \* When have you prayed urgently for something or someone?
- \* Thinking about today's news, who needs our prayers?

### *Week Four*

- \* What is a favorite hymn or piece of music that we sing at Nassau Church?  
What compliment sticks in your mind (from anytime)?

### *Week Five*

- \* What connotation does "silence" have for you?
- \* If you wanted silence, where would you like to go?

Give the group a moment to think about their response. You can model the amount of time for each person by answering the question first. You may need to remind them to keep their answers short; there is much more to discuss. Anyone may choose not to answer.

## *Closing Prayers*

### *Week One*

Ask for prayer requests from the group. Invite the group members to pray for the requests presented or for their unspoken concerns. Close your time together with a breath prayer, one from Week One or create your own. Repeat the breath prayer for at least a minute.

### *Week Two*

Conclude your time together with a breath prayer (see Week One) or allow time to lead the group in the steps of the *examen*.

### *Week Three*

Form pairs. Ask each pair to tell each other a prayer request they have for themselves. When everyone is ready, sit silently for a few minutes for each person to pray for their partner. Conclude the time of prayer with something like, "All these prayers we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen."

### *Week Four*

Close with singing the Doxology or read Psalm 100 in unison.

### *Week Five*

Close the time together with a time of silence, at least five minutes, concluding with "Amen."

***May leading your small group be a joy and a recognition that where two or three are gathered, Christ is among them, bringing reconciliation and restoration. Thank you.***

# Group Covenant

- \* What happens in the group stays in the group. To build and maintain an atmosphere of trust, confidentiality is essential.
- \* Speak and make space for others to speak. Each voice is important. If you are usually quiet, make an effort to offer your thoughts. If you speak out easily, hold back for others to speak or invite someone who hasn't spoken to speak.
- \* Stay with the group. Physically, be present at each gathering rather than treat attendance as just another option. Mentally, listen to others and participate.
- \* Focus on ideas, not the person. If you disagree, disagree with the idea, but don't belittle the person.
- \* Speak from your own awareness. When offering an opinion, claim it as your opinion rather than make generalizations.
- \* Everyone in the group is a learner. In a small group, there are no experts. Learning is a lifelong process.