

Prayer

Richard J. Foster

Discussion Guide

Prayer, by Richard J. Foster (HarperSanFrancisco, copyright © 1992), illustrates the many ways we carry on a conversation with God. It explores the many questions people have about prayer and leads the reader toward having a more satisfying and effective prayer life. The book covers 21 types of prayer in inward, upward and outward movements, which in turn, correspond to prayers to God the Son, God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit.

Permission is granted to reproduce this discussion guide.

Chapter 1

Simple Prayer

This chapter explores the most basic form of prayer where we come to God with our concerns and requests.

1. List and discuss some common misconceptions about prayer.
2. What is “simple prayer”? How does one practice it?
3. Share some of your experiences with prayer, including the highs and lows.
4. What appeals to you most about simple prayer? What new insight did you learn about it from reading this chapter?

Chapter 2

Prayer of the Forsaken

This chapter examines prayer when we feel a sense of absence from God.

1. Share a time when you felt forsaken by God and prayed about it.

2. Explain how darkness is a definite experience of prayer and can be expected and embraced.
 3. What lessons can be learned by feeling forsaken? How can you grow spiritually from the experience?
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Chapter 3

The Prayer of Examen

This chapter looks at the two aspects of examining prayer—remembering how God has been present during the day, and inviting God to search our heart and cleanse us.

1. In your own words, explain the Prayer of Examen and its two basic aspects.
 2. Discuss the reasons why God goes with us in the examen of conscience.
 3. What does one gain by the process of examen? What is its purpose?
 4. How can a spiritual journal help you enter the examen of conscience? What other ways are there to experience the examen of conscience?
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Chapter 4

The Prayer of Tears

This chapter examines the emotional side of prayer as we weep over our sins and the sins of the world.

1. Explain what the Prayer of Tears is and what is known and not known about it.
 2. Discuss the reason for emphasis on and the benefits of the emotional side of prayer.
 3. List and discuss the four actions that can help us experience a contrite heart.
 4. Discuss why this kind of prayer is so difficult for us. What cultural messages do we get about being emotional?
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Chapter 5

The Prayer of Relinquishment

This chapter discusses prayer that leads us to relinquish our own wills to God's will.

1. Why is our struggle with God's will important to our spiritual growth?

2. Explain how the Prayer of Relinquishment moves us from struggling with the will of God to releasing one's own will. What is the end result of this prayer?
3. Why is the "crucifixion of the will" a spiritual treasure? How do you experience it?
4. List and discuss the 5 specific practices/prayers suggested to help you relinquish your own will and turn over control to God for situations in your life. Share a time in your own life that you were able to relinquish a situation and allow God to take control of it.

Chapter 6

Formation Prayer

This chapter examines prayer with a focus on transformation.

1. Discuss the statement, "Prayer changes things." What does the author believe the primary purpose of prayer is? Do you agree or disagree?
2. In your own words, explain the meaning of Formation Prayer and how it is useful.
3. List and discuss the different classical *proactive* and *passive* approaches to Formation Prayer. How do they differ? How are they the same?
4. Discuss the active pursuit of humility as an approach to Formation Prayer.

Chapter 7

Covenant Prayer

This chapter shows us how Covenant Prayer guides us toward a commitment to God.

1. What is Covenant Prayer? What does it call us to?
2. List and discuss the kinds of commitments we are called to make in response to God's covenantal love. Do you find keeping these commitments difficult? Why or why not?
3. Share your thoughts about preparing your heart for prayer and worship. What preparations are helpful to you?
4. Discuss the benefits of fixed prayer and why people shy away from this type of commitment.

Chapter 8

The Prayer of Adoration

This chapter considers adoration—giving God our worship, thanks, and praise.

1. Share what divine intimacy means to you and its connection to adoration.
2. What are the two sides of adoration? What distinguishes the two?
3. Discuss the obstacles to adoration as identified by C.S. Lewis.
4. What feelings and experiences are triggers for prayers of adoration?

Chapter 9

The Prayer of Rest

This chapter examines how through this prayer we can find stillness and rest in God, even in midst of chaos.

1. At what times does Jesus invite us into his rest? Share an example from your life.
2. Discuss what *sabbath* means. How do you practice sabbath in your own life?
3. Discuss what it means that prayer takes place in the middle voice.
4. List and discuss the 3 practices designed to lead us into the Prayer of Rest.

Chapter 10

Sacramental Prayer

This chapter looks at how sacramental prayer is embodied and mediated through liturgy, Eucharist, and preaching.

1. What does it mean to say that “prayer is incarnational”?
2. Discuss some concerns that are sometimes expressed about Sacramental Prayer. Do you share these concerns? Explain.
3. How do we pray with our bodies? Give an example from the Bible.
4. Discuss the freedoms that liturgical prayer provides.

Chapter 11

Unceasing Prayer

This chapter explores a way of constantly keeping in touch with God.

1. What does the Bible say about Unceasing Prayer?
2. Share what appeals to you about this type of prayer. Do you consider it difficult? Explain.
3. Discuss what breath prayer is and why it is discovered more than it is created.
4. List and discuss some of the steps one can begin to take toward “praying without ceasing.”

Chapter 12

The Prayer of the Heart

Prayer of the heart is a prayer of intimacy between us and God, our Divine Parent.

1. What is meant by the Prayer of the Heart being an “abba prayer”?
2. Discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in this prayer.
3. List and discuss the many ways the Prayer of the Heart can be expressed.

Chapter 13

Meditative Prayer

This chapter explores how in this prayer the written Word becomes a living word addressed to us.

1. Discuss the purpose and process of Meditative Prayer. How does it differ from the study of Scripture?
2. What role does imagination play in this prayer?
3. What does it mean that God addresses us personally in Meditative Prayer?

Chapter 14

Contemplative Prayer

This chapter explores how a prayer can immerse us into the silence of God.

1. Discuss the goal of Contemplative Prayer and how you prepare yourself for it.
2. What are the 3 steps of Contemplative Prayer? Why is a teachable spirit important?
3. How is Contemplative Prayer a wordless baptism?

Chapter 15

Praying the Ordinary

This chapter examines how the ordinary experiences of life can become a prayer.

1. What do you consider ordinary? Give some examples from your life.
2. In your own words, explain the meaning of Praying the Ordinary. How do you see God in the ordinary?
3. List and discuss the 3 ways we “pray the ordinary.”
4. Do you see your vocation as a hindrance to prayer? Can you pray while working? Explain how work becomes prayer.

Chapter 16

Petitionary Prayer

This chapter explores prayer that reminds us of our dependency upon God.

1. Discuss why it is sometimes difficult or uncomfortable to ask God for things.
2. What did you learn about why some prayers go unanswered? Give an example of unanswered prayer from your prayer experience.
3. List and discuss the two most common problems in Petitionary Prayer.
4. Discuss why the *paternoster* or Lord’s Prayer is a “total” prayer. Share what saying this prayer has meant in your own experience.

Chapter 17

Intercessory Prayer

This chapter looks at the process and reasons for praying for others and their needs.

1. Share a time when you were the subject of Intercessory Prayer or when you used it yourself to pray for someone.
2. What do you think are the most important things to remember about Intercessory Prayer?
3. How and why does Jesus act as our Intercessor? What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus?
4. Discuss corporate intercessory prayer and how your church or group might participate in or help organize a prayer group.

Chapter 18

Healing Prayer

This chapter shows how God works through prayer to bring health to us.

1. Share an experience you have had with Healing Prayer.
2. Discuss the reasons why not everyone for whom we pray is healed.
3. Discuss what you should and should not do when attempting Healing Prayer.
4. List and discuss the four steps involved in Healing Prayer.

Chapter 19

The Prayer of Suffering

This chapter explores prayer that asks God to use our difficulties in a redeeming way.

1. Discuss the purpose and meaning of redemptive suffering.
2. What did you learn about suffering from this chapter? How does God help us in our suffering?
3. How do you cope with suffering? What helps you endure? Give an example.
4. How does suffering involve wrestling with God? What are some stories in the Bible that illustrate this aspect of suffering?

Chapter 20

Authoritative Prayer

This chapter looks at prayer that uses the authority of God to command something be done.

1. Discuss how Authoritative Prayer differs from personal or devotional prayer.
2. List and discuss some situations where Authoritative Prayer could be utilized.
3. Discuss the connection between authority and compassion.
4. List and discuss the 7 cautions the author gives about using Authoritative Prayer.

Chapter 21

Radical Prayer

This chapter examines the use of prayer that aims at the transformation of persons, institutions, and societies.

1. Discuss the meaning and purpose of Radical Prayer. How is it prophetic?
2. What did you learn about the true prophetic message from reading this chapter?
3. How and why does this kind of prayer involve a radical engagement with our community and world?
4. What insights about the many types of prayer did you receive from reading this book? How has your prayer life changed?