

o p e n i n g p r a y e r

Leader's Guide

Three Movements of Prayer:

- Prayer Opens Us
- Prayer Opens Us to God
- Prayer Opens Us to God's World

Featuring:

- Janet L. Ramsey, Associate Professor of Congregational Care Leadership
- Wendell W. Frerichs, Professor Emeritus, Old Testament

Also featuring Matt Howard, Shelly Domke, Jean Larson

FOR THE LEADER

Thank you for agreeing to facilitate this video series, *Opening Prayer*. Whether you are sharing leadership in this study, or it is the responsibility of one person, you are participating in something important and meaningful. Thankfully, the discussion belongs to the whole group, and does not rest solely upon your shoulders. Your job is simply to initiate conversation, inviting others fully into the discussion. Keep in mind that people participate in groups in different ways. Some may be more quiet, while others like to speak up. Help facilitate as you see best, welcoming each person to the group, and their contributions. You may need to keep in mind time considerations, helping to keep the group focused and on-track.

You will be in charge of making sure there are all the appropriate materials that the group will need for that session, including photocopies of the study guide sheets and some bibles, if desired. Occasionally, a chalkboard, whiteboard or large easel might be helpful in recording the group's responses, but a piece of paper and a person to record will do.

You might want to give some attention to the place where you will be meeting, setting up the DVD/monitor ahead of time, along with arranging chairs and any tables. Begin and end each session with prayer. This helps center and focus the group. After watching the DVD, there may be questions or issues that your group wants to discuss that evolve naturally. Go with these if they seem appropriate! Otherwise, follow-up questions are provided to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to use the provided Bible verses to prompt conversation, or challenge participants to find or remember verses that are helpful for discussion.

OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

- ***More Real Prayers*** by Wendell Frerichs. The prayers featured in the video come from this book of prayers. Dr. Frerichs wrote and prayed these prayers during his many years of teaching at Luther Seminary. The book is available at lutherproductions.com.
- ***Meeting God in Prayer***. This video series from Luther Productions features an intimate conversation with some teachers of the church as they share their biblical understanding of prayer, their own stories of prayer, and point to the promises of a God who meets us in prayer. Available at lutherproductions.com.

What you need

- TV or projector
- DVD player
- Bibles, if desired
- Paper and pencil/pen for jotting notes

Photocopying

Feel free to photocopy the contents of the following three pages of this guide to use as a handout.

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p r a y e r o p e n s u s

Prayer through life's seasons

How has prayer changed in your life as you grew and developed? Who modeled prayer for you early on? Who has modeled in recent days?

The speakers on this video use different metaphors for prayer: "conversation", "healing, and "friendship." Which one most closely describes your prayer life today?

Psalm 51:15

"Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise."

Telling God the truth

How does confession of sin or "emptying the trash" work in your life? Do you find that this aspect of prayer strengthens your relationships with God? With others? With yourself?

Do you ever have difficulty believing in and accepting God's forgiveness?

Psalm 15:2

"Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right and speak the truth from their heart."

Psalm 32:5

"Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity."

"You know who we are!"

Are there times when you resist sharing what you desire and plan with God? Do you know why you are afraid?

What Christian beliefs about yourself and about God might help you get past these barriers?

Psalm 139:1

"The Lord searches my every mind and understands every plan and thought."

"Do not abandon us!"

Why might someone ask God not to go away? Who listened to you when you were a child? Who listens to you today?

In our busy world, what do you find beneficial about having a regular quiet time with God?

Do you believe that the Holy Spirit gives us the words to use in prayer when we are tired, busy and sad?

2 Kings 19:16

"Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear."

To be truly known

How does our friendship with God differ from our friendships with each other?

This section of the video ends with a confession of faith, "God is alive and well in our world." Is this a belief you share and, if so, how does it make a difference to your life of prayer?

Psalm 42:7

"Deep calls to deep."

Psalm 139:23

"Search me O God and know my heart."

prayer opens us to God

“Written on my heart”

How might prayer remind us of our human need to acknowledge the Creator of life and all its gifts?

Do you ever struggle to balance God the Judge with God the Savior? How does this struggle enter into your prayer life? Do you find yourself expressing more fear of judgment or more gratitude for God’s blessings when you pray?

Psalm 24:1

"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it."

“A place where only God goes”

How have you or someone you have known experienced God in times of loneliness?

What does God know about you that no one else knows?

What might you pray today about being alone? About being lonely? About being in God’s company?

Psalm 90:1

"Lord you are our dwelling place in every generation."

Listening for God

Think of a time you experienced God moving you in prayer: giving you a word, thought, or phrase. Do you have memories of particular people while you pray, and do these thoughts help you to listen for God? What parts of community worship are most meaningful to your prayer life? Have you ever thought of your tears as prayers?

Luke 1:38

"Here am I the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

God, our parent

Several of the persons on this video use male pronouns for God; was that troubling for you? How might God be like a loving Daddy? A caring mother? In what ways do images of your parents enter your prayer life?

Matthew 6:9

"Pray for them in this way. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

“I’ll be with you!”

Friendship is a two way street: Do you experience God as a friend who helps you discern what choices to make in your life? Does prayer also help you to live as God’s friend?

To what new places have you been called by God, through prayer?

James 3:23

"Abraham believed God and was called the friend of God."

prayer opens us to God's world

Being Transformed by Prayer

What the world needs now... What does prayer do to change the pray-er? What might prayer do for our hurting, broken world? How might speaking more openly and often about the power of prayer help us to live as though we really believe that God is transforming our world—day by day, person by person?

1 Timothy 2:1

"I urge that supplications, prayers intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone."

Expanding our hearts, sharing the burden

What happens when you share a burden, pain or hardship with a friend? When you take up a friend's burden, and begin to pray for her? Do you agree with the poet who said, "Sometimes One is more than we can bear"?

Psalms 102:1-2

"Here my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily when I call."

Increase our compassion, Lord!

It has been said that we must be careful what we pray for; what might happen if we pray for more compassion? Do you agree that prayer helps us to move from selfish to self-less? Is it possible to care for others over time without God's help?

1 John 4:19

"We love because he first loved us." How does God empower us to love others?

God, the source of our love

Does prayer change the way you relate to the "Other" in your community, the one who is different from you? How has God made it possible, through prayer, for you to embrace when you want to exclude and reject?

Matthew 19:19

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Standing at the foot of the cross

Do you find yourself talking to God, in prayer, as though you are always the victim and never the one who commits hurt or harm? Do you agree that God is "soft on crime?"

Have you ever been able to forgive someone, after a long struggle, through the power of God in prayer? Do you ever imagine the Cross when you pray? If so, how does this change your prayer?

Luke 6:27

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you."

God's Presence in the World

Has there been a time in your life when prayer was like a fragile thread connecting you to the love of God in Christ Jesus? Is prayer giving you the strength to proclaim God's love in the world? How might prayer help us to take God seriously?

Romans 8:39

"Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."