

# Session 3 : Intro

SHAPING PRAYER IN OUR SMALL GROUPS



## OPENING REFLECTION

- In your small group, what do you pray for?
- What are the five most common topics of prayer in your small group?
- Do you think your small group prays well?

### GIVE A SCORE OF 0 - 5

- With 0 being not at all and 5 being that you are extremely happy with your small group's prayer life.

**If you have not written 5, what would it look like to pray better as a group?**

Of course, we are not trying to endorse that we should be scoring our prayer life.

But this is a good way to start to teach us how to evaluate where we are at and where we would like to get to.

Jesus taught us to pray – which means we've got something to learn – and as we will see, words from Scripture should shape our prayer lives and the prayer lives of our small groups.



Using ideas and inspiration from  
Side by Side by Edward T Welch: pub Crossway  
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/4-suggestions-to-deepen-your-small-group-prayer/>

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## LET'S LOOK AT HOW JESUS PRAYS

We are going to look at one of the Psalms that Jesus used at a time when he felt most acutely that God had abandoned him - Psalm 22.

The opening verses are instantly recognisable as being cries that Jesus used from the cross as he was dying. For Jewish people, using the opening verses from a Psalm was a way of using the whole Psalm as a prayer.

We can learn so much from what we read in this Psalm about how Jesus faced his suffering.



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## READ PSALM 22

### CONSIDER

How do you see the perspective of the psalmist changing through the psalm?

- on where God is in his circumstances
- on God's faithfulness
- on his present / past / future ?

### APPLY

- Do you find this a surprising way to pray? Why?
- How might this psalm bring comfort to us at times when we feel as if life has no purpose, or as if plans have failed?
- Think about the last time you went through a very tough time. How did you react in your prayers? Do you feel as if your relationship with God changes when you struggle?

This Psalm and Jesus praying it at his time of most pain gives us an example of how Jesus reacted to his suffering. We want to suggest it's a model for how we, and those we lead, can go through tough times and the circumstances.

It models a conversation that goes back and forth between our difficult circumstances and our hearts.

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## A DIFFICULT SITUATION ARISES

### Your heart may say:

'You see? Some of those doubts you had about your faith seem to be coming true. God can't really care as much about you as you've heard it said from the pulpit, and as you may have sung on Sundays. He's actually too busy to be interested in you. It's a hopeless situation'.

### Or your heart may say:

'Life is tough right now, but the Bible does warn us about this happening. I've heard and read about this! I'm going to hold on to what I've been taught. We have hope because of our faith - we have a Saviour who rides in the boat with us through the storm!'

One of the quickest ways our hearts can react is to give in to these spiritual attacks, which come from the one the Bible calls the Deceiver and the Father of Lies.

We may start to see tough times as a sure sign that God cannot be trusted or that he doesn't really love us as much as we've been taught. We can easily lose perspective and, like Peter when he took his eyes off Jesus, we may start to sink.

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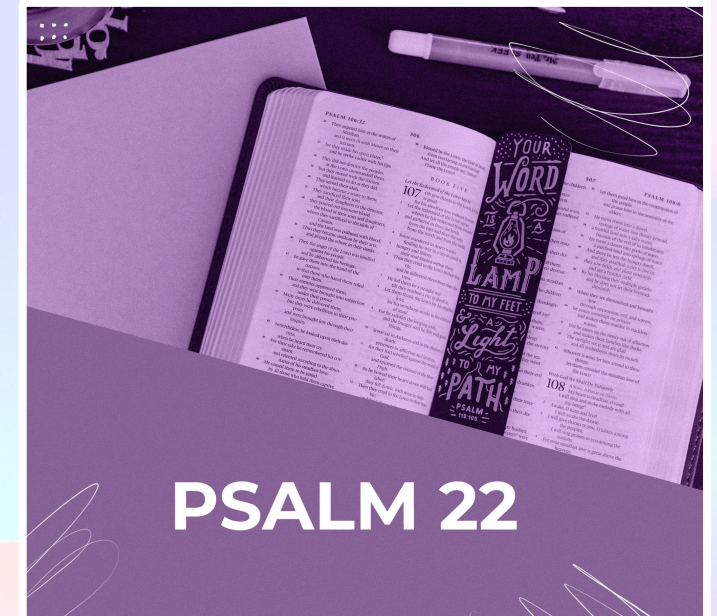


### HOW DO WE GET FROM ONE TO THE OTHER?

#### We can try to follow the dynamic of Psalm 22:

##### We learn to:

- express our complaints and our heart's cries honestly before God
- remember God's promises and his faithfulness to us in the past
- turn to the Lord for peace and a place of refuge



**'One of the critical spiritual skills for every follower of Jesus is to ...grow in trouble rather than rage or wither in it'.**

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## HAVE I SEEN THIS DYNAMIC REFLECTED:

- In my own life?
- In the lives of people in my small group?
- In the way we have spoken openly in our small group?

Think of one situation you know of in the life of someone in your small group and how you might bring / are bringing this dynamic to bear.



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**We want to help struggling people from our small groups to go on the same journey.**

First, we recognise that we cannot reach into another's heart.

Sometimes we walk away from God in anger, refusing to see that a God of love could allow this, and therefore allowing our circumstances to dictate our reactions.

No words from the Bible or from our Christian friends will help us.



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Please be assured. In that case you as a leader:

- Haven't messed up / not to blame
- It's hard for you - come and seek support

But often there is a great deal we can do:

- Make space for the honesty of people crying out "why have you have forsaken me"?
- Have confidence to encourage your fellow Christians to turn to God through struggles.
- Try to walk with people from **Psalm 22:1** through the Psalmist's journey to **Psalm 22:31**.
- Keep helping people to lift their eyes from their circumstances onto God
- Talk about our story and our experience - this models how to ask for help - we then testify as to how God has helped us and build up and encourage others.
- **PRAY DEEPLY TOGETHER**



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# Session 3 : Going deeper

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## SUGGESTIONS

1. As a leader, instead of leaving a few minutes for prayer at the close, why don't you try making prayer an integral part of your Bible study as a group.

If you are using the Emmanuel home group materials from the website, you will have noticed that prayer is one of the ways we start each study, and we encourage you to use the options that are provided with ideas of what you can pray at the end to link in with the study. You could finish your Bible study by keeping your Bibles open; asking a few people in your study to praise God for what we have learned; or asking him to cement into our hearts what he wants to use to help us to grow.

By doing this, we can try as a group to begin to use some of the aspects of small group prayer that are often neglected - praise, thanksgiving, confession and adoration - as we respond to what God has revealed to us.



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## SUGGESTIONS

2. **Let the Bible passage you have studied guide how you pray.**
  - Pray for the truths you have discovered in the passage to grow you, and to transform your small group, church, community, and world.
  - Thank God for what you've learned about his character today and ask him to embed these truths into our hearts as we seek to make him Lord of our lives.

3. **As we try to pray more Biblically, we seek to ask God to bring our prayers in line with what he wants - not what we want.**

If we tell God how he should run the world, this neither helps us to pray more biblically, nor does it help us grow and mature in our faith, as we are trying to control God. So, instead of your small group just repeating and rephrasing the request: "I pray for healing for Nancy's cancer" — how might we pray more biblically?

Pray for healing from cancer, but also pray for Nancy's trust in Christ to stay strong; for real confidence in her place in God's family and her ultimate destiny as his child; for patience with hospital appointments and for kind medical staff; for the chance to witness to others, and ultimately that God would be given glory from what she is going through.

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## AND FINALLY...

### 4. Don't forget to follow up

**How many times do we pray and then forget to ask what happened?**

Not only do we help to encourage the person we have prayed for by following up, but we ourselves actually end up missing out if we forget to follow up! Why?

**Because:**

God grows his church by blessing those who have prayed as well as those who have been prayed for. We experience peace and perspective when we lay things before God. If we don't follow up on our prayers, we may miss what the Holy Spirit has been doing - we may miss the opportunity to praise God for answers.

Of course, not all prayers are answered, and some take a long time to be answered. When this is the case, by following up, we turn back to God and continue to pray, reassuring our group member that we are doing so.

### REMEMBER

It's also hugely encouraging to hear each other's stories as a group. Sharing answers to prayer is such an encouragement - seeking prayer in times of heartache or unanswered prayer is so important.

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