



Principles for Smaller Scale Ministry | Praying with your Group

There's More

The beautiful gift of prayer is that it's connecting with the all-powerful, all-knowing, God, who always has more for us. As soon as we decide we have it all figured out, we're missing out on the "more" God wants to give us. Jesus is the perfect teacher. Ask him to help you grow deeper in prayer and help your group to grow deeper in prayer. Because prayer is a conversation with God, where we speak with Him and learn to listen for how He speaks to us--to learn the language of prayer, so to speak, the best way to learn it is to do it. **We help our group members receive the "more" God has for them by modeling how to pray in our groups, and giving group members the opportunity to "learn by doing," when we pray together in our group.**

God Loves Your Words

When we pray Our Father's or Hail Mary's we're praying with some of the greatest prayers ever written. Some of the greatest words of prayer contained in the Scriptures, in the words God gave us. God always meets us in these prayers and they're good to pray together in one voice. They draw us together and unite us in prayer. However, anything we can do to help people grow in comfort with talking with God in their own words will help them to grow in relationship with God. Help group members not to worry about finding the perfect words: Which would you treasure more and want to hang on your refrigerator? A print from a great artist or a stick figure crayon drawing given to you by a child that you love? Your words might be less perfect, but they're more yours. God loves your words, your voice, because God loves you!

Ideas for the Two Natural Moments for Prayer - Begin and End Your Group in Prayer

Opening Prayer - 30 seconds to 2 minutes

When we open in prayer, we acknowledge that God is present and ask Him to bless and guide us. Start the group with a brief opening prayer that models for group members how to pray in their own words. You might conclude by inviting others to pray together a prayer that you all know, such as the Our Father. If you've got a group which includes those new to the faith who don't yet know our Catholic prayers, simply end with the sign of the cross.

Closing Prayer - 5 to 15 minutes if possible

At the end of a good small group, group members have grown in comfort and connection with each other, making the close of your group a particularly good time to invite people to go deeper in prayer. We recommend planning to spend 10-15 minutes in prayer at the end if possible.

Meet Them Where They Are

Chances are good that in your group you have people with varying levels and experience with prayer. We have found that it's helpful to assume that there are people in your group who are not comfortable praying in their own words. Consider starting by modeling and inviting them deeper over time.

Invite them Deeper

There's a general progression that you can follow which can help your group to grow together in prayer. Here are a few ideas for how you can help group members grow in comfort and confidence praying in their own words from week to week:

1. Invite group members to take turns preparing a closing prayer for the group to read. Encourage them to consider bringing a prayer from our Catholic tradition or writing out a prayer in your own words. Before closing with this prayer, leaders can ask each group member to share their prayer requests, write them down, and ask God to answer these prayers (reading their requests straight from the list if you can't remember them). Then end with the closing prayer.
2. Give each group member a post-it note, ask them to write their prayer request on it, and have them find a partner, trade post-it notes, and explain to their partner what they would like prayer for. Invite group members to pray for their partner's request (and explain that they can read it straight off the post-it note, "Dear God, please bless [name] and answer her/his request...") Then close the whole group with the closing prayer brought by a group member.
3. Repeat the post-it note prayer request activity, but have group members pass their note to the left. Invite the group to share their prayer requests around the circle, explaining that each person is going to pray for the person whose post-it note they are holding and that they can read it right off the post-it note if that helps them. Go around the circle, each person praying for the person on their right, then end with the closing prayer brought by a group member.
4. Repeat the post-it note prayer request activity. Ask everyone to look at what they wrote. Is it for themselves or for someone else? If it's not for themselves, invite them to add to the note a prayer for themselves. Either pass around the circle or in pairs depending on your group's comfort level.
5. Over time, you may be able to reach a point where people are comfortable to share prayer requests with the group, and then spontaneously pray for each others' needs. This kind of prayer is sometimes called "pop-corn prayer," as people pray spontaneously in the group like kernels of popcorn popping.
6. As your group grows comfortable speaking to God in their own words, invite them to grow in listening to God in prayer. Scripture is a great place to start. Consider *Lectio Divina*. See additional handout for tools to lead your group in prayer through Scripture.

Remember as you continue to grow in your personal prayer life, your group will be blessed and will learn with you. Keep pursuing God's "more." Know that we're praying for you!