

LEADER GUIDE
SESSION 2

We Pray for One Other

GETTING STARTED

DISCUSS: What team or group hobby or pastime do you prefer to be a part of?

RECAP (PAGE 71): Almost 60 million people run for exercise, and almost 111 million walk for the same reason.¹² This discipline is commendable, yet many more decide to run or walk each year, only to quit after a few weeks—or days. What causes some people to stick it out and others to quit?

While we might suggest many reasons, a great motivator can be the presence of others. It's easy to say, "I've gone far enough," when you're by yourself, but runners are great at encouraging each other to keep going. Marathon runners are known for verbally "high-fiving" each other. They know it's hard, and they support one another. There's strength in numbers.

This truth applies to our prayer lives as well. God certainly hears the prayers of the solitary individual, but we experience something wonderful when we gather with others to pray. As a church, we need one another, and we support one another through our prayers.

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Point** on page 72. Invite group members to fill in the blanks.

THE POINT: The church is strengthened as we PRAY.

STUDY THE BIBLE

GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT: Paul was a pray-er! He prayed for the churches he established (Ephesians 1:16; Philippians 1:4). He encouraged other Christians to pray for him and other needs in their locales (Philippians 4:6). He urged them to pray regularly (1 Thessalonians 5:17). One of his most famous prayers is his request for divine deliverance from the "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). God didn't remove the thorn, but Paul learned to rely on God's power in his struggles.

RECAP (PAGE 72): Culture tends to reduce prayer to asking God only for tangible things in times of pressing need. Christians, on the other hand, should hold a much wider view of prayer. Don't get me wrong; God assuredly cares about our needs. In another letter, Paul said we're to pray about *everything* (Philippians 4:6)! We should keep praying for God's provision in our lives, but prayer involves much more than asking for our own concrete needs.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 3:14-17a on page 72.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 72: **Pray for the POWER and PRESENCE of Christ to be manifested through His church.**

RECAP (PAGE 72): Humanly speaking, obeying God rightly is impossible. If we're to have any hope of regularly following what our heavenly Father has commanded us, then we must depend on His power. The reality is we're desperate apart from His power, so we pray to be strengthened with power from the Holy Spirit—and we're to pray that same prayer for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul prayed another spiritual prayer for his flock: “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (v. 17). Through saving faith, Jesus already dwells in our hearts, and God has promised, “I will never leave you or abandon you” (Hebrews 13:5). But sometimes we don't feel like that's true. When times are tough or discouragement runs deep, we might think Jesus has gone away. As we grow in Christ, our faith matures, and maturing faith reminds us of God's promises. God Himself, through His Holy Spirit, is the One who matures our faith. The Holy Spirit not only empowers us to obey Jesus, but He also comforts us with the presence of Jesus.

DISCUSS: How do you typically approach the discipline of praying for others? *[ALTERNATE: How does prayer help us experience Christ's power and presence?]*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 3:17b-19 on page 72.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 73: **Pray for a deeper sense of God's LOVE.**

RECAP (PAGE 73): In these verses, Paul was ultimately praying for the Ephesian believers to grasp God's love fully. And it's what you and I should be praying for each other in Christ's church. Here are three things we can petition the Lord to provide for ourselves and other Christ-followers:

- ▶ **A continual recognition that it was God's love that saved us and it's God's love that sustains us.** Regardless of how we might feel, God loves us and has always loved us. He loves us today, and He'll keep loving us tomorrow. In Christ, we're rooted and firmly established in God's love. Pray that we will remember this.
- ▶ **A clearer understanding of the full measure of God's love and character.** We'll never fully grasp everything about God and His love. We can know God deeply through praying, reading His Word, walking with His people, and experiencing His care through life's circumstances. Pray that we would grow in knowing God's love more deeply each day.
- ▶ **A daily awareness of the sacrificial love of Jesus on the cross.** Jesus' suffering on the cross was the primary way God demonstrated His love for us (Romans 5:8). Therefore, we never have to wonder if God really loves us. Pray we never stop marveling over that truth.

DISCUSS: What have you found to be true about God's love? *[ALTERNATE: What are some ways you've experienced the depth and breadth of God's love?]*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 3:20-21 on page 73.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 73: **Pray that God would be GLORIFIED through His church.**

RECAP (PAGE 73): Paul closed his prayer with more words of worship: “To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (v. 21). By finishing his prayer this way, Paul presented the ultimate purpose of our praying together, living together, serving together, and everything else we do in the church and beyond. That purpose is the glory of God.

DISCUSS: When has God gone “above and beyond” what you asked of him? *[ALTERNATE: How would you paraphrase verses 20 and 21 in your own words?]*

DISCUSS: What are some specific ways our group can pray for our church?

DO: Instruct group members to complete the activity, **For His Glory**, on page 73, on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

For His Glory: In the space below, record a brief prayer list for your church and small group. Include specific needs you’re aware of, as well as the things Paul mentioned in Ephesians 3:14-21.

LIVE IT OUT

LEADER PACK: In advance, make copies of **Pack Item #9**, the “Praying for Others” handout, and distribute them to your group members. Encourage your group members to use the ideas found in this practical guide as they pray on behalf of others.

SAY: “How might you adjust your prayers to align more with the spiritual priorities of God? Consider the following applications.”

GUIDE: Direct group members to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 74. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer life this week.



- ▶ **Confess.** In order to realign your prayer life in a more God-centered, others-focused direction, confess to God the ways you’ve prayed in self-centered ways.
- ▶ **Pray.** If you’re not in a regular discipline of prayer, begin now. Keep a journal of your prayer requests to ensure you’re also praying for the spiritual and physical needs of others.
- ▶ **Pray together.** The best way to grow in praying together in Christ’s church is by praying together! Commit to a regular time to meet and pray with one or two other believers from your Bible study group.

GUIDE: Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 74) to guide their discussion. Encourage group members to spend time each day in God’s Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 75–78).

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Ask a volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 3:14. Then, discuss all the reasons God deserves for us to kneel before Him. If your group is physically able to do so, guide them to close the session by kneeling in prayer. Lead them to pray for God’s power to be manifested in your church, for a deeper sense of God’s love, and for God to be glorified through your church. Encourage those who are uncomfortable with kneeling to do something else as a sign of yielded submission to God, such as praying with hands open on your lap.

PRAY: Close your Bible study time with prayer.

DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

[VERSES 14-15]: For several verses Paul had focused on Gentile Christians in the church. Beginning in verse 14 he highlighted his prayer for the church. Paul would kneel as he prayed. Typically, Jewish men would stand while praying. Kneeling suggests the depth of Paul’s feeling for the Ephesian Christians and his reverence for God.

[VERSES 16-17A]: We begin to see what we might call Paul’s prayer list. He was always concerned about young Christians becoming more mature in their walk with Christ. Paul wanted them to tap into the power of the triune God. They would not face life’s obstacles alone. They could be “strengthened with power.” Though Paul highlighted God’s power as a resource for the Christian life, he also affirmed the “riches of his glory.” Here Paul featured God as a power or energy source for those who might be struggling in the Christian life. He prayed God would strengthen each believer in his or her “inner being.” Paul was concerned about the total person, not just spiritual issues. He probably meant abilities humans have, such as reason or conscience. Another way God strengthens His people is by the indwelling of Christ in people’s hearts. Paul highlighted the intimate, personal relationship between Christ and His followers. Christ dwells in our hearts. Bible scholars note that the word *dwell* suggests a long-term relationship, not a temporary visit.

[VERSE 17B]: Paul repeated “I pray that” (Ephesians 3:16) as he continued his prayer for Ephesian Christians. He put forth his desire for the spiritual and moral development of his readers. He hoped they would develop a deeper sense of God’s love. Paul emphasized the role of love in the growth and maturation of the Christian life. The Greek language had many words translated “love,” but Paul typically used *agape*, the kind of love God has for us. *Agape* is the sacrificial, unselfish love that should characterize the Christian life.

[VERSE 18]: Paul prayed Christians would begin to comprehend the love God has for His people. As hard as we might try, as finite human beings we can't truly comprehend God's love. We can offer Greek word studies or find weak analogies for love on the human level, but the immensity of God's love for us and His church is hard to capture. Paul knew that "all the saints" shared the desire to understand and appreciate God's love at a deeper level.

[VERSE 19]: Paul's main point continued in verse 19, since he understood that Christ is the unique Son of God. Unfortunately, we sometimes think of God the Father as stern and angry but Jesus as loving and compassionate. Paul knew the entirety of God has a consistent character. Paul's prayer that Christians "be filled with all the fullness of God" might puzzle some readers. Sometimes Paul used the idea of fullness to highlight the full deity of Jesus as God's unique Son. To be full of God for us means we have a strong sense of God's presence and guidance in our lives. As Paul wrote to believers who had already experienced God's love and grace, he prayed for their growing comprehension of what God had done for them through Jesus.

[VERSE 20]: Paul referred to a frequent theme: the power of God. God "is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think." Earlier Paul emphasized the vastness of God's love in Christ (vv. 18-19). Here the magnitude of God's power is the focus. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul knew first-century readers needed to be reminded that God is all-powerful. Just as readers would struggle to comprehend God's love, so the immensity of God's power is "above and beyond" what we might even think of asking God to do. This divine power is available to empower Christians. God's power works in us.

[VERSE 21]: Paul wasn't inspired to give a full description of God in this prayer, but he mentioned several key aspects of God's nature and character, such as God's love and power. Paul reminded his readers that everything we do should glorify God. Our actions as Christians can help other people, but all credit for those actions goes to God.

GROUPS MATTER.

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