

## IN OUR SMALL GROUPS

### WHY?

- We want the presence of God among us more than anything else (and he loves to be with us when we gather). Prayer is never just 'us'. The Trinity joins us!
- We want everyone to participate and grow in prayer. This is an 'equal-opportunity' group and we want to explore and find meaningful ways for all of us to pray.
- We believe God can show us things and pour in his love as we pray—and that will change how we pray.
- Our prayers matter, because God acts in response to spoken prayer, not just thoughts.

### TIPS

#### 1 Create an environment for prayer

- Ensure people are comfortable. Being too cold or too hot, too close to others or too distant, bothered by phones, children, or even pets, is highly distracting. Some people need 'atmosphere' before they can focus on the Lord and pray freely.
- Create a restful place where prayer is natural. For many, coming to a small group is like coming to an oasis. Discuss what things refresh them in their time together, such as quietness, pondering the Scriptures, music, praying their burdens, the sense of harmony, etc. Include these regularly.
- Recognise the presence of Jesus at the start: 'Thank you Jesus that you're here ... you are so full of love ...', etc. Describe what the spiritual reality is and your faith will bring his presence to your awareness. This often melts people's hearts and opens them up to God and his direction.
- Often, our focus is on events or people and our struggles. It helps for the leader to offer focus, perhaps providing a short Scripture to ponder, or asking everyone to give thanks for something. Just asking for prayer 'out of the blue' can be daunting.
- Use songs on a CD or if you have a musician, sing together. Make sure the songs you choose are easy for a small number of singers.

#### 2 Encourage everyone to participate

- Small-group prayer should be a family conversation 'with the Father', with everyone contributing (different from more formal church-service prayer). One person speaking in long prayers isn't much of a conversation! Instead, one person might begin with adoration or intercession, with another picking up the same topic and adding to it, and then another person doing the same, so that you have lots of short 'waves' of words and agreement.

- Jesus said that when he was in the midst of his people they would 'agree' in prayer. This means harmonising together. Consider prayer in a group being an orchestra with different instruments, different sounds and different parts, all doing their part to create a symphony. The Spirit is the conductor, and Jesus and the Father are the audience. Together, we are the harmony that delights our God.
- To ensure all members understand the desire for everyone to participate, talk about this and consider agreeing on some ground rules and expectations (for example, keeping to one topic per prayer and no more than 1-2 sentences).
- People hesitant to pray often need a long time to take the plunge. If you pray anytime there is silence, *they won't!* If this is happening, consider not praying yourself until you've slowly counted to 60 in your head—see what happens!

#### 3 Encourage a range of ways to pray

- Teach your group to pray the Word of God. Personalise a verse. Pray its promises, declaring the intentions of God or exalting his nature. Use prayers such as those in Psalms, the Lord's Prayer, or prayers from people in stories. Take a phrase and 'breathe' it gently in reflection a number of times to 'stir' prayer.
- If people are frequently hesitant to pray, ask them to pray a written prayer. Write one for them or ask them to write something at the end of your study. Let them read a hymn or piece of Scripture. Encourage them to write a prayer or poem during the week and bring it to share.
- Use symbols. Have a discussion about what 'things' remind you of God in your daily life; then ask members to bring them along with them (if possible) to share.
- Explore the shape of Psalms with their declarations, praise, petitions, etc. Then ask everyone to write their own psalm and share it or write one together.
- For a season, think about different aspects of God—his goodness, his majesty, etc. Getting people to bring something such as a song, poem or object that speaks of this aspect can be inspiring and enlarging. Make a list together and ask people to pick one they would like to share about at a later meeting.

#### 4 Cultivate meaningful silence

- Not the awkward silence that occurs when no one responds to suggestions to pray or worship (which can come from not preparing people sufficiently). Meaningful silence can just 'happen' after music or someone's prayer. Let the group savour the moment for a few minutes then ask, 'What do you think was happening just then?' A fresh direction for prayer or worship will often come out of people's answers.

## 5 Change the dynamic when praying for needs

- Pray in twos or threes—people often feel more comfortable sharing personal prayer requests with just one or two others (this also helps if someone is dominating with long or frequent prayers!)
- Have half the group sit on a line of chairs, with the other half standing behind them praying one on one. Then switch.
- Set up a 'hot seat' and invite a person to receive prayer from the others. Wait for words or pictures or Scripture for them. Consider writing these down for that person to take away.

## 6 Maintain a prayer diary

- Celebrate answers to previous prayers.
- Collect prayer requests before you start praying, then 'drip feed' topics to remind people of things they can pray for (or put the list in a central place that people can easily look at).
- Send an email during the week to remind the group of the things they are praying about.

## RESOURCES

### Books

- *Creative Prayer* by Christ Tiegreen (Multnomah books)
- *Praying the Bible* by Wesley & Stacey Campbell

### From the Booth College of Mission library

- *The Way of Prayer: a Small Group Experience in Spiritual Formation* by Vennard and Briant with workbooks (253.7 THO). A very tender and imaginative way of exploring prayer through a variety of means: Scriptural, contemplative, with music, heart prayer, with our bodies, etc. Lots of helpful exercises.
- *Transforming Prayers: 40 Unique Experiences* by Jenny Baker with reproducible handouts (248.32). Designed for youth, but its tangible, practical experiences would help all of us enjoy prayer.