

## Week Two

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# *The Rhythm of Prayer*

“They devoted themselves...  
to prayer”

## INTRODUCTION

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### **Let's be honest, prayer can be a struggle.**

We sit down to pray, with all good intentions, but our minds just wander to the to-do list. We get the words out, but they just sound wooden or mechanical. Or it just feels like we're talking to thin air.

Far from being 'devoted to prayer', many people go through life with a low level guilt that they don't pray often enough and don't pray well enough. This week's Bible passages have been chosen, not to pile on the guilt, but to look at what the Bible teaches about the heart of prayer.

We'll look at two Psalms and three teachings from Jesus. Then, in your small group session this week, you'll have an opportunity to experience praying together with the people in your group.

That's because the best way to develop a healthy rhythm of prayer isn't just reading about prayer or learning a formula, but to simply begin praying.

**Our** prayer is that through Chapter One, you will develop a regular rhythm of connecting with God. Why? Because through the incredible noise of the universe, there is a Father God who loves you, who knows you... and who hears every single prayer you pray.

**He** is devoted to **you**.

## BIBLE PASSAGES

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Use the notes on 'How to read the Bible' to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

### Day one

Reading: Psalm 27:4-5

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### Day two

Reading: Psalm 19:1-6

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### Day three

Reading: John 10:1-16

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### Day four

Reading: Matthew 6:1-8

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### Day five

Reading: Luke 11:5-13

# 1 Rhythm of Prayer | It's all about relationship

Reading: Psalm 27:4-5

## DEVOTIONAL

We spent last week looking at the truth of the Gospel: God creates a perfect world, with human beings his work of art. We rebel, in our thoughts, words and actions – but out of love, God makes a pathway back to Him, through Jesus, that is open to all.

Jesus has won for us eternity with God in heaven, but He has also won for us the reality of relationship with Him today.

Our means of relating to God is prayer... but where do we start? What do we say? We can fall into the trap of seeing prayer as a ritual, an item on a tick list, another thing to squeeze in to an already busy life – and another thing to feel condemned about when we don't get around to doing it.

And so we miss it. God is everywhere, but we're distracted.

It's possible to have dinner with the person we love most – a husband, a wife, a sister, a friend – but because our minds are elsewhere, to never enter into their presence. We can do that with God, too.

David, the writer of today's psalm, says the one thing he desires is to be close to God. This is more than ritual, this is relationship. It is a hunger for his presence. This is the sort of longing that drives a persistent prayer life.

Through prayer, we can get close to our heavenly Father and spend time in His house, without having to use special words, and without being restricted to a specific place. Just talking and listening to the one who made us and who knows us best.

What is your **one thing**? What is the thing you want more than anything else? Is it happiness? Success? Money? Is it a friendship or relationship? Or is it God himself? To know Him, and to be near Him?

This week, we're looking at the rhythm of prayer. Wherever you are on your journey, why not ask God to give you a hunger for more of Him, and to reveal to you more of what He's like? Because of Jesus, you can talk to Him anytime, anywhere. Why not now?

## RESPONSE

What is your 'one thing'? Honestly, what is the one thing you want more than anything else? If you know it's not God, ask Him to give you more of a hunger for Him.

## NOTES

## 2 Rhythm of Prayer | The God who speaks

Reading: Psalm 19:1-6

### DEVOTIONAL

Dip into any book of the Bible and you'll soon encounter something stunning – something we can so easily take for granted. God speaks to human beings. Ordinary people in very ordinary places, hearing from an extraordinary God.

Moses hears from God on a mountain. Elijah in a cave. Samuel, as a young boy, in his bed. Our God speaks and wants to be known. *Maybe it's not God who's hiding... perhaps it's us.*

Here are some ways in which God might speak to you today wherever you are... in the car, at work, in the kitchen:

First, God will speak to you through the **Bible**. This incredible library of 66 books, written by people but 'breathed' by the Holy Spirit, that all tells one coherent story pointing to Jesus. The Bible is alive! It has the power to speak right into your situation today.

God will speak to you **supernaturally**. As you listen for Him, He'll put visions, words and pictures in your mind. He'll put people on your heart, helping you to see people and situations like He does.

God will speak to you through his **creation**. The writer of today's psalm talks about the skies, day after day, proclaiming the work of God's hand... speaking to us about his majesty and his glory.

And God will speak to you through other **believers**. A word of encouragement from a friend that helps change your perspective. A word of knowledge that unlocks a situation. It's one of the reasons it's so important to be in community with other Christians.

How often, in your prayers, do you just slow down and listen? How often are you aware of God's presence in the normal, in the everyday? How often do you turn your attention to God, and say, Lord, what do you want me to hear in this moment?

The God of the Bible is a God who speaks. Have you heard him recently? What is He saying to you... and what are you going to do in response?

### RESPONSE

Start today by asking God to speak to you throughout the day. End the day by jotting down anything you heard, through prayers, through other people, through the Bible, through the world around you. What do you notice? How is God speaking to you?

### NOTES

## 3 Rhythm of Prayer | The God who speaks

Reading: John 10:1-16

### DEVOTIONAL

Are there people in your life who you recognise over the phone even before they introduce themselves? What gives them away? Is it their tone? The name they call you? The better we know someone, the easier it becomes to recognise their voice. It's the same with God...

Sometimes when God speaks, we question it. Was that Him or was it just my own thoughts? Hearing from God is something that is learned. The more time we spend with Him, the more we'll recognise His voice.

In today's passage, Jesus describes himself as a good shepherd. Middle Eastern shepherds were known for talking and singing to their sheep. They'd play a repeated tune on a small flute so their sheep would have a consistent cue to follow.

The sheep would become so familiar with the sound, they'd know it from a mile away. So when an imposter called, they wouldn't bat an eyelid. *Similarly, the more time we spend with God, the more we'll recognise when He speaks.*

So what does it sound like, the voice of God? His voice is **consistent**. What He says in the Bible – what He has said to you in the past – these things are still true today.

His voice is **accepting**. It's the voice that says to you "above all else, you are mine, and I love you."

His voice is **challenging**. It's the voice that has your best interests at heart; that says: "If you'll allow me to, I'll help you change those things in your life that you know you need to change."

And His voice is **encouraging** – not in a fluffy sort of way, but in the truest sense of the word – a voice that gives you courage to face the things you're facing. That's the voice of the Good Shepherd. Always loving, kinder than we know, always with our best interests at heart.

Do you know it, that voice? Have you heard it recently? Are you deliberately placing value on hearing from Him? Are you slowing down enough to listen?

### RESPONSE

Spend a few minutes writing a prayer to God about something that's on your mind. Then ask the Good Shepherd if there's anything He wants to say to you. Write down what He says.

### NOTES

## 4 Rhythm of Prayer | Be authentic

Reading: Matthew 6:1-8

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### DEVOTIONAL

In the passage today, Jesus is teaching his followers how to pray. *This is God teaching us how to approach God.* And what He says could be summed up in two words: 'Be authentic.'

When you pray, don't use religious formulas or say things out of mindless obligation. Don't use lengthy words for the sake of it or babble on and on. Don't try to impress the people around you with the words you say.

Just come to Him, honestly, with all your raw feelings. Even when those feelings involve anger, disappointment and frustration.

One of the best prayers I've ever heard was from a junior doctor at a prayer meeting in a hospital in Kenya. She'd spent the day with a family with a very sick baby, and during the day, the baby died.

At this prayer meeting, she prayed a prayer like I'd never heard before. She said: "I can't understand why you let this baby die! I trusted you to save her, and you didn't." This prayer was so honest, and so full of faith. *It was authentic.*

When Jesus says, don't pray on street corners, but instead go into a room and close the door, he's not saying 'never pray in public'. He's simply saying your public prayer should be an overflow of your private prayer. And both are about an authentic relationship with your Father.

Heaps of books have been written on how to pray. But perhaps the best way to learn is simply to listen to a young child talking with his or her dad.

Look at the intimacy. Look at the joy. Look at the honesty and the openness. Look at the *informality*. That kind of conversation isn't forced or mechanical or stuffy, it's intimate and alive. That is what meaningful, authentic prayer looks like.

So when you pray today, say what you really think. Be authentic.

### RESPONSE

Go into a room, close the door, and tell God how you really feel. What's going well? What are you finding hard? What are you angry about? What hurts?

### NOTES

## 5 Rhythm of Prayer | Prayer as a first instinct

Reading: Luke 11:5-13

### DEVOTIONAL

I wonder how many opportunities we pass up each day, by not praying about them? Things we deal with, without asking God to help us.

God is at work all around us, all the time. Sometimes we notice him at work in our own lives and in the lives of others, just because He is so good. *But God is also the one who invites us to ask, rather than just barging in.*

What is your first instinct in a situation... both when things go well, and when things go wrong? How do you deal with the 'normal', the everyday? Is turning to God your first instinct or a last resort?

When Jesus teaches his friends to pray, He says, "ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find." He invites us to come to Him continually... to be 'shameless' and 'audacious' in the way we ask.

*He has good gifts to give us, and He wants us to ask for them.*

In our society, we have lots of great things that make life easier. And when things go wrong - whether it's our car, our home, our body - we have people we can call on to fix the problem. We also have a mentality of independence - we don't tend to like to ask for help or admit that we're stuck.

And so, if we're not careful, prayer can get pushed down the list. It can become a last resort... something reserved for moments of crisis, when everything else has failed.

Instead, what might happen if prayer became our first instinct? How many more stories of answered prayers and God working in day-to-day life would we have? How much more peace would we experience because we turned to God first and looked to him instead of ourselves for the answer?

When we pray, when we bring all these things to God, we tend to realise that the thing we need more than anything else is his presence... which is precisely what He loves to give.

*How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?*

### RESPONSE

Is prayer your first instinct? Who or what do you tend to go to, before you go to prayer? In everything you face today, take it to God first, and see what He does.

### NOTES