

Kurt Johnson
Prayer
Works

Bible Study Guides
for Small Groups or Personal Study



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A Word From the Author

The thoughts, ideas, and concepts expressed in these lessons have evolved over time and in my personal experience. Ideas have been gleaned not only from books but from other people. Joe Aldrich, for example, provided ideas and inspiration as I heard a presentation he made on the topic of prayer. Others whose contributions I wish to acknowledge include Don and Ruthie Jacobsen, Larry Evans, Kevin Wilfley, Chad and Debi McComas, Janet Rowe, Jerry and Janet Page, Bob Dale, Monte Sahlin, Gordon Retzer, and Tom Baez—all of whom have worked closely with me in prayer conferences.

I am a different person today because of my efforts in preparing these study guides. The topics presented here have driven me to my knees and caused me to analyze my own prayer life. I have had to ask God for forgiveness where I have come short. And I have had to ask Him to make me a better man of prayer—a Spirit-filled man of prayer.

One cannot study God's biblical message to Christians about prayer and remain unchanged. I pray that God will make us different people by the time we have completed these studies. May it be said of each of us, as God said of Saul, "The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you, and you will . . . be turned into another man. . . . God gave him another heart" (1 Sam. 10:6-9).

It is my prayer for you that each day Jesus will become dearer to you as you grow in your communication with Him. May God be with you. Please pray for me—and I'll pray for you.

—Kurt Johnson

Introduction

Many would consider the single most important principle in the life of a Christian to be what it has always been—to be a man or woman of prayer. For too long, Christianity has largely denied this principle. No matter who you are or what your status, a life not built on prayer will come to emptiness. Too many try to build their lives and ministries upon such foundations as hard work, education, materialism, sports, talent, or popularity. None of these work.

The fruits seen in our lives will be equal to the development of our inner walk with God. No matter how pure our motives, if there is no inner life, there will be no fruits of the Spirit.

Jesus did not tell Christians to organize always, to equip always, to attend committees always, or to preach always. But we have been told to pray always. The greatest gift a Christian has to offer the world, the church, or their family is their personal life of prayer.

God shapes the world by prayer. The more people pray, the better life is. One may live in a society surrounded by the influence of sin, but the person who prays lives in an atmosphere that frustrates Satan. The praying Christian is protected by the strength and support of a victorious Saviour.

There is hope and faith in prayer. Prayer will make a radical difference in your life, in your identity as a person, and in your Christian experience.

About Small Group Bible Study

Small group Bible study can be both enjoyable and educational. The small group concept is not new—its foundations can be found in both the Old and New Testaments. The early church—in the time of Jesus and in the years that followed—was a community, home-based Christian movement. Christian church buildings were virtually nonexistent in the Roman Empire until the time of Constantine.

These study guides follow a format that has proven itself workable down through the years. The goal is for a group of interested people to meet in a home, public meeting room, church, or another location and study God's Word together. Ideally, the group will be three to 12 individuals sitting around a table or in a circle for an hour and a half or two hours, one day a week, studying, praying, and sharing together.

This experience should be relaxed and nonthreatening. Often group members come to the meeting from various religious backgrounds. Some may never have studied the Bible; this could be their first experience. Some may not know the location of Bible books, or how chapters and verses work together. Others will have studied for years; they can assist those just learning.

Prayer, Bible information, and opinions will be part of the group discussion. Some group members may never have prayed out loud before. Others will be quiet and shy. Still others will love to pray and talk. Be aware of these differences. Never use pressure or put anyone on the spot. All discussion and prayer should be voluntary. As a general rule, do not go around the circle for prayer, answers, or discussion. Allow for spontaneous, voluntary responses. This makes the group more relaxed and enjoyable and allows for differences in personality and experience.

Three things are essential to all group Bible studies. Those essentials are (1) sharing (getting better acquainted with one an-

other), (2) Bible study (understanding and learning about God's Word), and (3) prayer (applying what we have learned to personal life and asking God to assist us).

The format suggested in this book is based on these three essentials and will be similar in each study. A brief description of each major section of the study guide lessons is as follows.

GROUP LIFE

This section will provide an enjoyable beginning for each of your meetings. Some of the study guide lessons will discuss the dynamics of what can make your group life stimulating and enjoyable. Your Bible study group should be a friendly place. A nonthreatening question to which group members may share their answers will assist them in becoming better acquainted with one another. This is a "fun" time you will come to appreciate.

SCRIPTURE AND LIFE

Each lesson will provide an introduction and background material that will shed light on the passages to be studied. As group members dialogue and compare one scripture with another, the experience will result in a positive learning environment.

APPLICATION TO LIFE

We must keep in mind that Scripture is not only for study but also for living. Each group member will be given a private, personal moment to reflect on how he or she wishes to respond to the topic. The lesson then concludes with a reflection and prayer suggestion. As you study the messages in each lesson, Scripture will be allowed to speak for itself, as God intended. Experience has shown that the topics of this series, when examined and applied to life, will assist group members in finding fulfillment and meaning in daily living. May God guide you as you open the fascinating pages of His message for our day.

L e s s o n

God Is Ready

“A great many people do not pray because they do not feel any sense of need. The sign that the Holy Spirit is in us is that we realize, not that we are full, but that we are empty.”—Oswald Chambers.

GROUP LIFE

One of the benefits of group Bible study is the opportunity to develop close friendships with one another. As the weeks go by, your group members will become special to you. Prayer with God is similar. The more time we spend with God, the better we come to know Him.

Share with your group what prayer was like in your home as a child. Did your family pray daily? at meals? family worship? Who led out in prayer at your house? Dad? Mom? Grandma?

If time permits, everyone in the group who wishes to can share. If time is limited, only a few may have the opportunity. Remember that in group life, no one has to speak who does not want to share. Never just go around the circle. Instead, allow for a spontaneous response, which is a much more relaxed approach.

SCRIPTURE AND LIFE

The Scripture passage in our study is Luke 18:1-8. This parable of Jesus has been called by some the parable of the persistent widow. The setting is approximately March of A.D. 31. Lazarus has recently been raised from the dead, and it is a few weeks before the death of Jesus. Jesus has been discussing with His disciples two of the key ingredients in Christian living: forgiveness (Luke 17:1-4) and faith (verses 5-10).

During a discussion with His disciples, the Jewish religious leaders interrupt Jesus. They ask Him when His kingdom will come. Jesus responds by telling His disciples about the events and

signs of His coming. Directly following this instruction on end-time events, Jesus tells the parable of the persistent widow. Jesus connects this parable of prayer with living in the final days of earth's history.

Read Luke 18:1-8 in a modern version of the Bible.

Verse 1:

1. This is a parable (a story with a lesson) about prayer. What does it mean to pray always? Apply your definition and suggest an example of a daily prayer schedule.

2. What does it mean "not to faint" (KJV) or "not lose heart" (NKJV)?

3. Have you ever been discouraged because it appears that God isn't listening to your prayers?

4. If you become discouraged about prayer, what do you do to overcome your discouragement?

The Jewish leaders taught that people should pray three times a day (Dan. 6:10). Two of these times were during the time of the morning and evening sacrifices offered by the priests on Israel's behalf. The other time was at midday. Some rabbis taught that the people should not pray at other times, to avoid disturbing God. (See *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 844.)

Verse 2:

This verse introduces us to one of the main characters of the parable—the judge. This judge probably would have been a paid magistrate appointed by the Romans. Ordinary Jewish disputes were taken before the elders and not into the public courts. The Roman judges were notorious for their injustice. Unless a plaintiff had influence or money to bribe his way to a verdict, there was little hope for justice. The judges were often called by the people “robber judges” (see Barclay, pp. 221, 222). Notice that Jesus does not specify a city or a specific person in this parable. He does not needlessly antagonize the people into charging Him with undermining the government.

5. What does it mean that the judge did not fear God or regard man? What is another word for fear?

6. Describe how you think the judge would treat people today? Modernize the story.

Verses 3-5:

Verse 3 introduces the second character of the parable—the widow. Life is not easy when a spouse dies. However, being a widow today is usually much easier physically than it was in biblical times. A widow usually had no money, no property, no job, and no education. If she was fortunate enough to have a son or a relative to assist her, life was bearable. If the widow had no one, she could easily become a street person.

A beautiful characteristic of God is that He cares for all and watches out for their well-being. A widow is no exception. James

says it is “pure religion” to visit the widows “in their affliction” (James 1:27, KJV). Jesus spoke against the Pharisees because they “devour widows’ houses” (Matt. 23:14).

This particular widow had an enemy—an adversary—who was causing her difficulty. It may be that the enemy was taking money or property from her. Whatever the case, there was no legal aid or court-appointed attorney available. The widow went to the judge for assistance.

7. What parallels do you observe between the widow’s condition and the sinner’s?

8. At first what was the judge’s attitude toward the widow? (Verse 4)

9. How did his attitude change? (Verses 4, 5)

10. Why did he change his attitude?

11. Some, in studying this passage, stop at verse 5 and say, “I understand. I am to pray without ceasing so as to convince God of my need.” Is the purpose of praying “without ceasing” to convince God of anything?

12. If not, why should we pray without ceasing?

Verses 6-8:

This parable is a study in contrasts or opposites. Immediately after telling the story, Jesus interprets it.

13. What is the contrast or point that Jesus wants the reader to understand?

Suggestions:

- Compare the characters of the judge and God.
- Compare the judge's motives with God's motives.
- Compare the widow's condition and situation with that of a Christian or non-Christian. Are they similar?
- Compare the judge with God in their responses to human needs.
- Discuss the judge's willingness to listen to the widow and God's willingness to listen to people on this earth.

14. Who are the elect of verse 7?

15. What does it mean to cry day and night?

16. How does God “bear long” with His people?

Points to consider:

God may be “bearing long”—that is, appearing to delay His response—for the following reasons.

- God is putting into operation events that in the future will accomplish what is best for us.
- God may be allowing a negative situation to continue in order to give the persecutor time to repent.
- The delay may help develop our character.
- The delay intensifies our need of God.

Remember that 2 Peter 3:9 states: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise.”

17. What does Jesus mean when He asks: “When the Son of man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

18. Why do you think Jesus concludes with this question?

19. From your study of this parable, what does it teach you about God’s readiness for us to pray?

A Final Thought

The theme of this parable is that as Christians, we are not really like the widow. The widow was poor, powerless, and forgotten. The judge was a stranger to her. We are God's adopted sons and daughters. We are part of the family! The riches of heaven are available to us! The judge is nothing like our heavenly parent. God is righteous, loving, sympathetic, and just. We do not have to beg. God is standing with open arms to meet our needs. He invites us to come to Him just as we are with our hurts, brokenness, and sin. Look at His promises!

"I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

"He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper" (Ps. 72:12).

"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isa. 26:3).

"And all things, whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matt. 21:22).

No voice in prayer is sweeter to God than yours. What are you waiting for? He is ready!

APPLICATION TO LIFE _____

At the conclusion of your group meeting, take time to pray together. Remember that not everyone is comfortable praying aloud in public. Some may never have been taught to pray. Because of this, never simply go around the circle, and never expect everyone to pray. As you pray, ask for special requests for prayer and for two volunteers to pray. Also, pray for your group members to grow in their prayer life. Begin your time by providing 30 seconds for silent prayer. At the conclusion, read the Lord's Prayer together.