

Step up your prayer life



4 Sessions



RELIANT
on God in prayer

Part of Gold Hill's 'Take a Step' discipleship pathway.
www.goldhill.org/disciple

Make the most of this guide

We believe this guide can be transformative. But as with most things, it can be used to the fullest or not have much impact. It depends how you use it. To help you get the most from it, we strongly suggest you ask and answer these 3 questions:



1. Who is alongside me?

This is not designed to use alone as a private study. You will get the most if you go through it with someone and take these steps together. If you haven't already worked that out, who could you ask to join you?



2. When will we meet?

It's best to have a plan before you start. You only need 4 slots, each 1–2 hours, and no closer than a week apart so you have time to try things out. So put them all in the diary up front.



3. Will we give this a real go?

In this guide there will be questions to consider and discuss, but the real impact will be as you give things a go and put things into action. Then it won't just be information but transformation. Will you do that?

As you use this guide together, there are various things that we will suggest along the way. They are marked by these different icons:



READ

Read these bits. (And interrupt if you want to discuss!)



DISCUSS

Use the prompts, and have an open chat about it together.



ACTION

These are things to do, either together or before next time.

Step up your prayer life

One of the most common things that Christians wrongly believe is that everyone else has a great prayer life while theirs is flat. It can seem as though everyone else has mastered prayer, that their time with God is full of passion, consistency, energy and answers. While our own is somewhere between average and stale, or has faded away altogether.

This is not normally true. Most of us, in one way or another, can find prayer difficult. We know it is a wonderful gift and a brilliant thing, we really do, but we also know we can find it hard. This guide aims to help you step up your prayer life. Wherever you are with prayer now, there should be things to help you step forward. The structure is borrowed from Pete Greig's excellent book 'How to Pray', so you'll be going through four aspects of how to P.R.A.Y.: Pause, Rejoice, Ask and Yield.

OVERVIEW

1. Pause: getting in the rhythm

We start very practically. Setting up a rhythm so we can regularly pause with God in prayer is where it all begins.

2. Rejoice: praying your worship

In our prayers, we start with God and that means starting with thanks, praise and worship for all He is and all He's done.

3. Ask: praying your desires

God wants us to bring our desires, our needs and our situations before Him, to invite Him into them.

4. Yield: praying your obedience

In praying, we do not stay the same. We give God our will, our sin and our commitments, that He may lead us on.

Pause: getting in the rhythm

session 1

In this first session, we are going to work through some of the practicalities of praying, and explore how to establish good rhythms and routines that will help lay the foundation for a great prayer life.

Where are you starting?



Talk about what your starting point is. What does prayer look like for you at the moment? What do you like? What don't you like? Where would you like to be with prayer?

Note down some of the key things here, so you can look back on it later:

My prayer life now:

Where I would like my prayer life to be:

The rest of this conversation will fall into two parts:

1. Barriers and Breakthroughs in your prayer lives
2. Some teaching from Jesus that can help us forward

Then you will make a personal prayer plan to help build your own rhythm.

Barriers and Breakthroughs



Lots of things that can get in the way. We know that to build a rhythm of prayer we need to make time and space regularly, but things can make that hard. So start by being honest about that. List the **barriers** that get in the way for you, both the 'external' and 'internal' ones. And share with each other.

EXTERNAL

(i.e. other people, circumstance, etc.)

INTERNAL

(i.e. your personality, experience, etc.)



Now talk about some potential **breakthroughs** for each of the different barriers you've identified. You might be able to think of things each other could do or try.

Turn the conversation to things that have helped your prayer life in the past. A realisation, person, technique...anything! It could be that remembering and returning to these would be a breakthrough again now. Jot them down.

“When you pray...”



Now we turn to some of Jesus' teaching on prayer, which will help us find ways to pause and build rhythms of prayer in our lives. Read **Matthew 6:5-8**. Then talk about the questions.

⁵ “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

***Note:** Jesus then gives the model of the Lord's Prayer. We will look at that in future sessions. We are starting with some practicalities to make a plan for **how** to pray so that can then be filled in as we come to **what** to pray.*

1: What does Jesus say our praying should **not** be like? And why? Are there times when you've found yourself tempted to pray like that?

2: In these words, what can we take on board about our **internal** attitude to praying? And how might that influence your own approach to prayer?

3: Likewise, what instruction is there about the **externals** of prayer, the more practical side? How might those things apply in your own life today?

4: If you took Jesus' words 100% literally here, do you think it would improve your prayer life?

5: Jesus says our Father God knows what you need 'before you ask him.' How does that make you feel? How might it impact your approach to praying?

Personal Prayer Plan



You are now going to form a 'Personal Prayer Plan', a practical rhythm of prayer to adopt, tailored to you. This will then be filled by the different types and content of prayer explored in the next sessions.

Take some time individually filling in your plan. Be as precise and practical as you can. Vague plans lead to vague actions.

My Personal Prayer Plan

When will I pray? *(e.g. 7am for 20min, before bed for half an hour)*

Where will I pray? *(e.g. on the train, in the spare room)*

Who will I pray with? *(e.g. by myself, with my family)*

How will I pray? *(e.g. silently, with words, in tongues, by journaling)*

Share your plans with one another, and commit to starting them right away. They aren't set in stone, and of course if there are blips along the way that isn't game over. But it's good to start as we mean to go on!

PRAY

Before you finish, take some time to pray for each other, specifically for the things you have shared and the decisions you have made together.

Rejoice: praying your worship

session 2

In this session, you will explore the first of three aspects of our prayer lives in terms of **what** we pray. Sometimes when we find ourselves becoming stale it's because we've focused so much in one area to the neglect of others, so it is good to embrace a breadth of prayer again. We start with worship, as we **rejoice** in our prayers.



CATCH UP *since last session*

Before starting on this next week's material, how did you get on with the things you shared last session? Take a little time catching up on that first.

Why rejoice and worship?



Jesus begins his model prayer (the Lord's Prayer) like this:

"This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven, holy is your name..."

We see here a couple of examples of how we worship God in our prayers. We worship Him because of:

1. **Who God is:** *'our Father in heaven'*
2. **What God is like:** *'holy is your name'*



'Father' and 'holy' describe who God is and what He's like, but there are many more aspects to praise and worship Him for. Talk about what aspects of God's nature mean most to you. Note them down so they can fuel your prayers this week.

Another reason we can worship and thank God in our prayers that could be added to the list would be:

3. What God has done: *in our salvation, and in our lives now*



Again, generate some energy for your prayers by sharing and noting down things that God has done which you can give him praise and worship for.

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If we're honest, one reason it can be tough to worship God in prayer is that there are things we find confusing or difficult. Things about who God is we don't understand, or things He has not done. If you have things like that, jot them down. We'll return to them in future, but for now just note them.

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For the rest of this session, we are going to consider practically how we can worship God in our regular rhythm of prayer.

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How to worship in our prayers



Have a conversation about what kinds of things help you to worship God and be thankful to Him, either things you find helpful on your own or when you're with others.

Do you see ways you could more regularly incorporate some of those things into your own time with God in prayer?

A toolbox for worship in prayer

Here are some ideas you can look through together. Look at each one and talk about whether you think it'd be helpful for you. Put a tick next to any of them you plan to try at some point.

I will try this



Journaling

Start with the same questions each day. Who is God? What is He like? What has He done? And write your answers as prayer and worship to Him.



Music

Whatever style of music works best, put it on and let it draw you into worship of God. Sing along or don't, but worship God through music.



Pray with others

If you regularly make space to pray with others, you can all share points for praise, and give thanks to Him together.



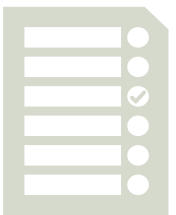
Praying the Psalms

The Psalms are full of descriptions of God and the call to worship Him. Read a Psalm (or part of one) and turn its words to prayer, thanks and worship.



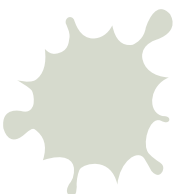
Pray in nature

For many, nature is a wonderful way of entering into worship of God. He made it, and it displays His wonder, so being in it to pray can help so much.



Make a list

It doesn't matter if it's in bullet points or a mind map, but get down as many things you want to thank God for, then thank Him!



Be Creative

Draw, paint, sculpt or dance your thanks to God. It is wonderful to use the creativity He has given and turn it back to Him in worship and praise.

Before finishing this session, take a look back over what you have discussed and make a note of what you plan to take away. Share that with one another so you can check in next time and encourage each other.



TAKE-AWAY *from session 2*

Use this space to note down what are taking away from this and any actions you've decided on. It might be that you want to update your 'Personal Prayer Plan' too.

PRAY – thank God together

Finish by praying together, and in particular take time to thank God, for one another, for your conversation, for who He is. And ask Him to help you as you seek to deepen with Him in prayer.

Ask: praying your desires

session 3

In this session, we explore the next aspect of our prayer lives: **asking** God for His involvement in our lives. This is not all that prayer is, but it is definitely a big part of it, and part of every good prayer life.



CATCH UP *since last session*

Before starting on this next week's material, how did you get on with the things you shared last session? Take a little time catching up on that first.

What are we asking for?



Last time we thought about the start of the Lord's Prayer. It continues:

"your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread."

We see two big things here that Jesus models for us to ask God for:

- 1. God's work in our lives:** *'your kingdom come, your will be done'*
- 2. Our needs met by God:** *'give us today our daily bread'*

We will look at each of these, and we are going to start with our needs.

Bringing our needs to God

'give us today our daily bread'

The particular need Jesus mentions is 'daily bread'. Most of those listening to Him wouldn't have to worry often about whether they'd have food tomorrow but He encourages them to pray it anyway. Jesus wants us to pray for all our needs, simple and complex, big and small.



Q1: What difference do you think it would make if you asked God about every single need in your life?

Q2: Are there areas of your life you feel you are more likely to pray about or areas you are less likely? Why is that?



Read these words from **Matthew 7:7-12**. They come not long after Jesus gave the Lord's Prayer. Then have a conversation around the questions below.

⁷ "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹ "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

1: The different images of asking, seeking and knocking are all variations on a similar idea. What does each of them speak to you? What are the differences and similarities?

2: Jesus seems pretty direct that when we go to God about things we should expect Him to respond with good things, to answer when we pray. Are there times you can point to where you have definitely experienced that?

3: What about times when that's harder to believe? Be honest here! What encouragement can be drawn from these verses?

4: What do you make of the words about a son asking for bread, comparing human response to requests with God's response?

5: What inspiration will you draw from Jesus' words in your own prayer life?

God's work in our lives

'your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'



Q1: This is a pretty big (and maybe abstract) prayer! How does it connect with everyday life?

Q2: In asking for God's work to be done in your life, are there areas of your life you are more or less open to that in?



'Your Kingdom Come' Imagination Exercise

The next part of the session uses our imagination to invite God into a particular part of our lives. Some people find tapping into their imagination easier than others, but give it a go! (The best way to do this is for one person to lead the other through it and then swap over.)

Step 1: Picture a real situation

Draw to mind a particular situation in your life, something really going on. Describe it as it is right now.

Step 3: Ask Jesus what He sees

Ask Jesus to help you see it as He does, and try to describe it, not in your words but in His.

Step 2: Ask Jesus to enter in

In words, say to Jesus that you'd like Him to enter that situation, that He is welcome to have His way there.

Step 4: Watch what He does

Imagine Jesus is taking over in it. What does He do? What does He change? How does He behave?

***Note:** Whatever you've imagined may or may not be what Jesus is saying. You shouldn't assume this is definitely Jesus' heart for it – it could be yours! The aim is to open up in asking for His vision, and let it impact your prayers.*



After you've each had a go, discuss what it was like.

Have a conversation about any ways you might pray differently about that situation as a result, if at all.

A toolbox for asking God for things in prayer

As last time, here are some things you could do in your prayer life in the area of asking God for and about things. Put a tick next to any you plan to try.

I will try this



Journaling

Whenever you ask God for things, note it down with the date. Every so often, go back through it. How has God been at work in response?



Imagination exercises

You can do the exercise above as you spend time with God in prayer. It's a great way of asking God for His heart and bringing things to Him.



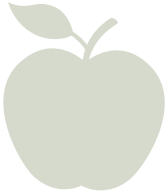
Prayer with others

If you are regularly praying with others, you can share your prayer requests, needs and desires and pray for and with one another.



Set yourself reminders

We all need a nudge sometimes! You could set yourself a reminder for a certain time to stop and pray about a certain thing.



Prayer at mealtimes

'Saying grace' is a classic for a reason! We eat every day, so use it as a prompt to thank God for his provision, and pray for your needs.

As you did last time, consider what you plan to take away and do this week. Share that and remember to check in next time.



TAKE-AWAY *from session 3*

Use this space to note down what are taking away from this and any actions you've decided on. It might be that you want to update your 'Personal Prayer Plan' too.

PRAY – ask God to lead you

Finish by praying together, and in particular take time to ask that God will lead you forward in prayer..

Yield: praying your obedience

session 4

In this final session, we explore the last aspect of our prayer lives: **yielding** to God in our prayers so that He can lead us onwards. We'll look at a few ways we can do this in our praying, knowing that the more we surrender to God in our prayers, the more open our whole lives will be to Him.



CATCH UP *since last session*

Before starting on this next week's material, how did you get on with the things you shared last session? Take a little time catching up on that first.

Why are we yielding to God?



We have been looking at different phrases in the Lord's Prayer. The final part is this:

*"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*

Prayer is more than simply asking God to intervene in our lives. We also pray to give ourselves to God and to His purposes. This means a few things:

1. **Giving God our sin:** *'forgive us our debts'*
2. **Aligning our will to God:** *'as we also' (also 'your will be done')*
3. **Submitting to God's leading:** *'lead us...' (not in our own direction or the Devil's, but only where God wants us to go)*

We will explore how this kind of praying can grow for us, looking at yielding our sin to God, and yielding our wills to Him.

Confession of our Sin



Q1: Have you prayed about your sin before? If so, how have you done that, and what has the result been?

Q2: What do you think the power of praying about our sin can be, and are there any dangers in doing so?

Q3: Should our confession be to God, to others, or both?



Consider these words from **1 John 1:8-10**. They are not directly speaking only about prayer, but their truth definitely applies to the ways we pray about our sin. Then talk about the questions.

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. **10** If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

1: We all know in our minds we are not perfect. But are there ways your life displays the attitude of ignoring sin and pretending it isn't there?

2: John encourages us to 'confess our sins'. What could that look like in real, practical ways in our lives?

3: If we know, regularly, that we are 'forgiven' and 'purified', what difference would that make to the ways we then live?

There are two aspects to praying healthily about our sin: **confession of our sin**, and **declaration of our forgiveness**. They must be kept in balance. If we focus on sin too much, we can feel condemned. If we focus on sin too little, we lose the opportunity for God to work in us to give freedom from that sin.



Submission to God

When using the Lord's Prayer, straight after asking forgiveness, we commit to forgiving others. Not because we always feel it, but because God calls us to. It's an example of submitting in obedience to His will. We also see it in 'your will be done' and in asking for God's leading.



Q1: How easy or hard do you find it to submit to God's will in your life, and why?

Q2: The concept of 'obedience' can be unpopular. Why is that, and is that how you feel about it?



Unanswered Questions

One thing that can make it hard to submit to God's will is not understanding it. We struggle with questions about God's ways we can't understand. In session 2, you noted some down.

Take a few minutes by yourself. If you could ask God three questions, what would they be?

1

2

3

The aim here is not to answer these questions here and now. But bring them to God. Take a few minutes in prayer together simply saying to God that you have these questions or struggles or doubts, and that you want to present them to Him. In the Psalms, people do this again and again, and the very act of directing them **to** God is an act of faith and a worthy prayer.

“Not my will, but yours”



We have a model to follow in Jesus Himself. Just before His death, this is how He prayed, in **Luke 22:41-44**. (The ‘cup’ is an image for the suffering and pain he would soon face.)

⁴¹ He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed,
⁴² “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” ⁴³ An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. ⁴⁴ And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

1: Are there times when you've prayed a similar prayer to Jesus? Or are there times you wished you had but didn't feel able?

2: What was the result of praying for Jesus? Around Him, and in Him? Is that something we can expect today?

3: Is this prayer ('not my will, but yours be done') a prayer you are willing to commit to pray no matter what comes your way in life?

A toolbox for yielding to God in prayer

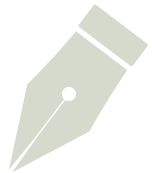
Once again, things you could try. Put a tick next to any you plan to do.

I will try this



Confess to others

By sharing struggles, or by asking questions of each other, there is huge power in doing this.



Write your sin down, and destroy it

To balance confession and declaring forgiveness, write down your failures, then destroy the list.



Declare 'Your Will Be Done'

Words have power. Be honest about your desires, tell them to God and repeat 'Your will be done'.



Rant at God!

Like the Psalms, bring struggles, doubts and fears to God, instead of just thinking it about Him.



Listen to God in prayer

To submit your will to God's, take time asking and listening about what His will is.



TAKE-AWAY *from session 4*

Use this space to note down what are taking away from this and any actions you've decided on. It might be that you want to update your 'Personal Prayer Plan' too.

PRAY – yield yourselves to God

Finish by praying together, committing yourselves to God, especially making the commitment to continue pressing in with your prayer life.



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