

## Small Group Prayer Retreat

### Getting Started

We are going to spend the next 30-45 minutes in group prayer together. I will be moving us through various focuses for our prayers. This is not meant to constrain our conversation with God but rather free us to learn more about the goodness of letting our prayers take the various forms scripture encourages them to take. Some prayers may come easily and be more comfortable to pray aloud. Some prayers may be harder to speak in the presence of others. Let's seek to enter together into the challenge of stretching to do what may be hard but produces good growth in us, and extending grace, to ourselves and others, to live within the limits we may feel today. We'll move slowly through these sections, allowing for silence and giving room for us to speak our prayers before each other. Whether you're praying aloud or silently, let's do be **praying**, drawing our attention back to what we most want to say to God and remaining open to what he might have to say to you, individually. Any questions? . . . . Let's begin.

### Upward prayer: prayers of praise and thanksgiving

Father, God, we know that all of life starts with YOU. So, too, must our prayers. As we settle our hearts and come to you together in prayer, we want to remember together who you *are* and *what you have done*. Though the circumstances of our lives and the darkness of our own hearts can obscure recognition of all that you are, we take the time now to stand in that truth and remember it together. We speak back to you the characteristics we know to be true of you. We recount together the ways your character is displayed in your actions in our lives, and throughout human history. We say with the Psalmist, "*Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God?*" (Psalm 77:13) Hear now our own words of praise and thanksgiving.

### Inward prayer: prayers of self-examination and confession

Holy God, seeing you for who you really are brings into sharp relief the ways we are not yet like you. All too often we are quick to justify our selfish actions, our responses to evil with evil, our inability to obey your commands because to admit these things challenges our image of ourselves. It exposes our deep need for you. And it brings us to wonder again if your grace is truly sufficient to change us and free us from these things. Examining our hearts before you brings us to once again wrestle with the truth that your forgiveness *really is* free because it *really was* costly, bought for us by our Lord, Jesus Christ. We need your help now, Holy Spirit, to **confess** our sins, and in so doing to **repent and turn** from them, as the offenses to your nature they are.

As we sit quiet before you, please reveal to us where our hearts have gone astray.

In silent meditation, consider if/how the following may be true in your life:

- The sin of pride and self-reliance – How have you resisted admitting need or weakness or in self-protection kept others at bay? How do you trust in the works of your own hands to accomplish what you long to see done? Where are you reluctant to wait on the Lord, or others, because the waiting challenges your ability to be in control of your life?

- The sin of hard-heartedness – Who/what is your heart cold toward? Why is that? What have you lost faith in regarding this person/situation? What do you imagine God’s heart beginning toward this person/situation? How are you out of line with that? What harm is that doing to you? To others?
- The sin of \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank)
- Acting out in sin – Where have you deliberately . . .
  - acted or spoken to harm someone?
  - spoken ill of someone or harmed their reputation?
  - taken what is not yours?
  - given into lust or greed?
  - sought your own advantage at the cost of another?
  - others?
- Not acted as you know righteousness requires - Where have you . . .
  - kept silent rather than speaking up for the vulnerable?
  - given in to laziness, slothfulness? lived by convenience rather than conviction?
  - entertained evil in your heart or mind?
  - judged others more harshly than you would yourself?
  - pursued anger, stress and fear over against love, joy and patience?
  - loved/valued a person or thing above God?
  - others?

Lord, we cannot see our sin apart from the Light of your Holiness revealing it to us. Thank you for loving us enough to reveal these things to us. Help us now speak a few of these things out loud to you, with one another present, as one way we repent and receive your costly forgiveness.

Jesus, thank you for taking our unrighteousness upon yourself. Help us now to walk now in YOUR righteous, which cost you so dearly to win for us.

**Outward prayer:** prayers of supplication and intercession

Lord, as the Good and Holy God that you are, and our only source for forgiveness and freedom from sin, we turn to you now to address the needs we see around us. We know we only see in part what you see in full, and yet our hearts ache at the sight of it all. Help us to look to YOU, our only source of Hope, in expectant faith as we bring these needs to you now.

We pray for:

- our families (immediate and extended)
- our community (church, neighborhood, work, etc.)
- our nation and the world (domestic and foreign governments, domestic and foreign situations)
- Your Kingdom to come (that the Lordship of Jesus would be acknowledged and expanded)