

Prayer and the Word of God

Leader's Guide

Breakthrough Prayer: Studies for Small Groups

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Group Leader's Overview

As you invite people to join this study, it will be extremely helpful to let them know what this study is and what it is not.

Although this study does lead participants to study the Bible, it is not a Bible study in the way most people think of one. The lessons are highly experiential; if people grasp and use the key ideas in this study, not only will their prayer lives change but their relationships with God will change as well. So it's important for people to understand that this study is not about looking up answers and learning information; it's about taking risks and investing time to know God relationally.

Another important distinction is that this study is not intended to result in a prayer group that spends a lot of time praying for each other or interceding for issues. Instead, the format encourages people to deepen their *personal* conversations with God.

Though the primary purpose of this study is to help the participants interact with Scripture in a way that deepens their conversational relationship with God through prayer, you may also discover what other groups have discovered: improved relationships with each other. The study's format and topics lend themselves to sharing life with each other.

The leader's role. Group facilitators do not need to be expert prayer warriors or spiritual giants in order to be effective. It's much more important that leaders be enthusiastic about how Scripture is helping them deepen in their own relationships with God through prayer, willing to be vulnerable about their spiritual journeys, committed to preparation and group times, and willing to care about and pray for group members.

Group members' participation. Because the goal of this study is to help people discover Scripture as a starting point for deeper conversations with God, it is important that group members understand that they will need to devote time to the study throughout the week. As a guideline, members should plan to spend twenty to thirty minutes a day in the study. This time includes reading Scripture, answering questions, and trying out what they learn in prayer practice. The lessons could work well for a quiet time each day if people wanted to use them that way. The lessons build on each other, so it's also best if participants attend group meetings each week.

Study format. Each lesson includes the following elements:

1. "*Think about It.*" These are questions to provoke thought and discussion about the key ideas that will be presented in each lesson.
2. "*Invite God to Speak.*" Each week this section will provide a new way to use Scripture creatively for prayer.
3. "*Going Deeper.*" This section is the actual study section of the lesson, with Bible verses to look up, things to think about, and questions to answer.
4. "*Your Turn.*" This final section provides several different creative prayer practices to help participants put into use the things they have learned in each lesson.

Number of weeks. The study is designed to be completed in six weeks, and most groups will probably want to use it this way. However, an alternate approach would be to add a week to each lesson and do the study over twelve weeks, allowing for maximum time to let the principles sink in. If you choose to follow a twelve-week model, plan for group members to complete and discuss the interactive questions the first week. The following week, focus on doing the prayer exercises and at the next group meeting let

members discuss their experiences.

Group size. The ideal group size is probably somewhere between five and eight members. But two people can do the study together and benefit from it. So can larger groups of twenty or so (such as Sunday school classes), provided you break the large group into smaller ones to discuss some of the questions.

Meeting length. A meeting time of ninety minutes each week is a good target. (If you want to include prayer time or time for fellowship and refreshments, you should aim for two hours.) If you need to meet for less time, that can work too; just keep in mind that you will need to keep the discussion moving and may need to skip portions in order to fit into your allotted time. Obviously, the less group time you have, the more important it will be that group members work through the lessons and prayer responses on their own.

Preparation

Keep the following points in mind as you prepare to lead the study in general, and each session in particular.

Recruit several people to support you in prayer. Enlist prayer support for yourself and your group from a trusted friend or two. You are engaging in important kingdom work: helping people know God, communicate with Him more lovingly and honestly, and experience His abundant life as they interact with His written Word. The enemy hates what you are doing and may seek to hinder you. Ask your intercessors to pray for God's anointing as you facilitate this study and also for His protection over you and your group.

Pray for each group member. Pray for each of your group members by name, daily if possible. Pray specifically that God will help them learn, wrestle with, and experience the concepts in each lesson. Let them know you are praying and encourage them to let you know how you can pray, especially regarding what they find challenging about the study. One way to encourage this kind of sharing is to model it by asking them to pray for you in a specific area that you'd like to grow in your prayer life and relationship with God.

Prepare well in advance. Work through each week's lesson well in advance of the day your group will meet. This way you can discuss your experiences with any group members you run into during the week. If they call or e-mail you with questions, you'll be able to respond to them. Your preparation will set a good example as well as give both you and your group confidence.

Decide how to use your time together. For each lesson you will find suggestions for your time together. These are only suggestions. Each group will be different, so ask God to show you what elements He wants your group to focus on, how to divide your time, how to open and close in prayer, and so on.

Customize the discussion. Talk to God about what portions of the lesson will be especially important to discuss with your group. You don't have to talk about every interactive question and prayer response. Some weeks you may spend the majority of your time on only one or two portions of the lesson.

The leader's notes for each lesson will give you some guidance to help draw out the main points. It would be a good idea to look at the lesson ahead of time to anticipate which questions and prayer responses your group will likely want to discuss together or need help working through. Then pace your discussion so you can be sure to have enough

time for those.

Keep in mind that the study was written to lead each participant through a personal experience with God; the interactive questions weren't designed as discussion questions for a group. Because of that distinction, you will want to discuss the ideas in the lesson but feel free to alter how you word or approach individual questions. For example, one question may ask group members to make observations about a Scripture passage and a follow-up question might ask them to interpret or apply that passage to their lives. That sequence of questions works well as individuals answer questions on their own, but asking both questions in a group discussion can feel tedious or elementary. In the group discussion you could combine the questions and invite group members to share what key points from the passages they wanted to apply to their lives.

Leading Group Meetings

Your role for this study will primarily be facilitator and encourager. You do not need to teach. The lessons will lead the group into discovery in which the Holy Spirit will do the teaching.

Provide a safe place. During your group meetings, you will need to provide a safe place for people to be real, to share honestly, to ask questions they may never have dared ask before, and to be accepted no matter where they are on their spiritual journeys. Here are three suggestions for how to create this kind of environment:

1. *Pray.* Pray for group members on your own time, asking God to help them feel safe and free to share their real thoughts, feelings, and experiences with others, no matter how “unspiritual” they may seem to be. Pray at the beginning of your sessions, asking God to help your group listen to each other, encourage each other, and accept one another at whatever places they happen to be in their walks with God.

2. *Be an example.* Chances are good you will be wrestling, experimenting, discovering, and learning right along with your group. Do not feel like you need to be ahead of the game. It's okay to admit your own questions, struggles, and victories in the process of getting to know God better. The fact that you don't have it all together will probably encourage your group that they don't have to have it together either! And that's a great place to be when it comes to experiencing the goodness of God in new ways, which is exactly what this study aims to do. Whenever possible, identify with the struggles and questions of the people in your group. Your vulnerability will help them relax and be comfortable with where they are in their spiritual process.

3. *Allow for diversity.* Recognize that group members will be at different places in their prayer lives. That's okay. These lessons work fine in groups of mixed spiritual maturity and experience, provided everyone realizes this and commits to contributing to a safe and accepting environment. In your first meeting time, stress the importance of being safe and accepting to all. Remind the ones who are further ahead to be considerate of and encouraging to those who are newer or struggling.

Foster discussion. Encourage everyone to participate, but don't push anyone. If some members tend to jump in on every question, encourage the less talkative ones by saying something like, “Let's hear from someone who hasn't shared yet.” Consider breaking your group into twos and threes on questions where you especially want to encourage participation. If you notice people who hardly ever share, begin praying for them as you're praying for the group on your own, asking God to help them open up and

to give them courage to share.

Handle sensitive questions. Notice ahead of time which questions or prayer-response exercises your group may perceive as especially personal. This does not mean you should avoid discussing them; however, try to be extra sensitive about how you bring up these questions and exercises. Allow group members a gracious way to opt out if they are not comfortable sharing. Alternatively, break your group into twos or threes. Many people feel freer to share in a small group than in a larger one. As rapport and trust grow in your group, many will become more open with their sharing even in the larger group.

If deep needs arise. It's possible that some of your group members will become aware of deep wounds, longings, or needs as they participate in this study. This is a good thing. It means God is working in deep places of the heart as people take the risk of sharing themselves honestly with Him. If someone shares a deep need during your group time, send up a quick silent prayer to God asking Him what to do. Ordinarily you will want to arrange for a time to meet with the person outside of your group meeting (perhaps another trusted, mature group member can join you). Encourage the person to pour out his or her heart to God and listen for His loving, healing response.

Encouraging Participation

This study is designed to provide practical, hands-on opportunities for people to grow deeper in their relationships with God through prayer. The members of your group will get the most out of the study if they work through each lesson on their own and come to the group time prepared to share what they have learned and experienced as well as where they may be struggling.

Since the object of this study is not to learn *about* prayer but actually *to* pray, the prayer responses and practices are essential. If your group only completes and talks about the questions but does not practice and talk about the prayer responses, you will miss the main objective of the study. You learn to pray by praying. Try to keep this crucial point in mind as you work through the questions. *Always* leave time to discuss the prayer responses. But as you do, also be sensitive to people's comfort levels in sharing. Invite but do not pressure.

You can encourage full participation in several ways:

- Before the first class begins, when recruiting group members, state your expectation that members will invest time in the study on their own.
- Model faithful and thorough preparation.
- As you talk with participants between group meetings, tell them what you are learning.
- In group time, be honest and vulnerable as you share your experiences and insights.
- Consider yourself an enthusiastic fellow learner and facilitator rather a teacher.
- Pray that God will encourage your group about what they are learning and experiencing so their enthusiasm is contagious to other members.

I realize not everyone can or will invest time on their own every week. If that is true of your group, you can still have a meaningful group time. Here are some suggestions to choose from that can help you get the most out of this study even if group members' outside participation is limited.

- *Assign a small portion of the upcoming lesson.* Ask God to identify a lesson portion that would be especially appropriate for your group (a section that takes fifteen minutes of preparation or less is a good goal). During your group meeting, assign this section for the next week. Perhaps group members can do this small chunk even if they cannot find time for the entire lesson. And perhaps the portion you assign will stimulate curiosity and get them to go further. But even if it doesn't, at least they will have done that one section.
- *Include individual time with God in your group meetings.* By discussing fewer questions, you can save time to allow people to get alone with God for one or two of the more personal questions or one of the prayer responses.
- *Do part of the lesson during group time.* Break your group into smaller groups (twos or threes) and divide some of the "Going Deeper" questions among them. Ask them to report their findings back to the big group. This way you can cover more territory in less time.
- *Extend your meeting length.* Some groups are happy to meet for two hours. Even if participants haven't done preparation ahead of time, a longer meeting time will allow you to cover most of the lesson together.

Before Your First Meeting

Make sure each participant has a copy of the study and understands that they need to complete the first lesson on their own before the first group meeting. Many in your group may already have a method for reading God's written word each day. If they do, wonderful. For those who don't, however, you may want to point them to Appendix A: Bible Reading Plan. Since the objective of this study is to help people engage with God through Scripture, a regular means of taking in Scripture is an obvious way of creating space for this kind of interaction to take place.

Lesson 1

God's Word Brings Life

Key Idea: God gave Scripture to us so that by receiving His words we experience life-giving relationship with Him—and life-giving relationship is the basis of prayer. As you pray for your group during the week, ask God to give them open hearts and minds to consider new ways of relating with Him. Ask Jesus to confirm to each of their hearts—and your own as well—that He really wants to give you life-giving relationship with Him through His written word and prayer. Ask God to help your group with time management so they will get off to a good start with finding time to enjoy the lessons and practice what they are learning.

Setting the Tone for the Study

On the day of your first meeting, review the “Leading Group Meetings” section at the front of this leader’s guide to refresh your memory about some of the goals and strategies of leading this study.

You’ll want to show up for the study ten minutes or so before it is scheduled to begin to make sure your room is set up, to pray and prepare yourself, and to welcome group members as they arrive.

Aim to begin on time because this study will probably require every minute of your time together. Begin by welcoming everyone and facilitating brief introductions. Share something short and personal about yourself with the group to help them get to know you—for instance, you might want to mention why you want to participate in this study or why you think it will be beneficial.

Make a simple transition such as, “Ready to get started?” and ask everyone if they had a chance to read the “How to Get the Most from This Study” section in their books. Review it together or if many of your group members have not read it, take a few minutes to read it together. Ask if there are any questions.

If group members express concern about doing the homework, look for ways to encourage them. Remind them that the study assignments could substitute for a daily devotional time. Also let them know that there is no rigid requirement for how to complete the lesson. If it works better for some people to do the assignment in two or three days instead of seven, that’s fine. Assure them that even though the assignments are important, it’s okay if they miss doing some on any given week. No one will scold them, and they can just share the parts they were able to do. Also reassure them that you are asking God to show them creative ways to find time to work on the study and talk to Him.

Tell the group how important it is to you that everyone enjoys the study, feels safe sharing, and grows in their relationships with God through prayer. Discuss the points from the “Leading Group Meetings” section about encouraging one another, being vulnerable, and creating a safe environment for everyone (see “Encouraging Participation”). Let them know you are learning right along with them, and you will be praying for them during the week. Invite them to share any prayer concerns with you.

Let everyone know that you will not always discuss every question in the lesson. Rather, you will try to cover the main ideas of the lesson and also give time to discuss prayer experiences as they practice during the week.

Ask if there are any more questions. If not, begin with prayer and get started.

Opening Prayer

Thank God that for giving you His written word so that you may know Him and enjoy life-giving relationship with Him through prayer. Ask Him to help your group embrace this incredible invitation and have receive all that He offers to you.

Discussion Points

Think about It. Invite the group to share their thoughts.

Invite God to Speak. Ask the group to share which verses they chose and why. What effect did praying a prayer based on this verse have in their lives this week? Especially encourage them to share how praying this verse affected their heart toward God.

Going Deeper

Questions 1 and 2. Invite your group to share their responses—but move quickly through these to allow more time for the questions later on.

Cynthia’s story and Question 3. Did anyone relate to Cynthia’s story? Invite your group to share their responses. If your group is shy to answer, you may need to break the ice by sharing your own honest response.

The Art of Receiving, Question 4, and Hindrances to Receiving. Ask your group if they are more like Mary or Zechariah when it comes to receiving. What difference does it make in the way they relate to God? Did any of the hindrances mentioned in the sidebar resonate for them? Which ones?

Question 5 and 6. Invite the group to share their responses. Encourage them that God welcomes questions that come from a heart that wants to believe.

Question 7. What role does pondering (meditating, reading and praying contemplatively, “chewing in”) Scripture have for your group? Invite them to share their experiences. Remind them about Appendix B: “Suggestions for Meditating on God’s Word.”

Your Turn. Which ones did your group try? Was relating to God in these ways new for them? How was it different from “normal praying”? How did it go? Will they try something like this again? Note: If listening to God is new to your group, encourage them to read Appendix C. Book 1 in this series (*Prayer Begins with Relationship*) is also a good resource for folks just learning to talk to God in two-way conversation.

Closing Prayer

Thank God for stretching you and your group and for opening you up to new ways of interacting with Scripture and relating to Him. Ask for His help to receive His words of life. Close your prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to encourage the group in the coming week as they are challenged to allow the Holy Spirit to have a more active role in their daily life and conversations with God.

Encouragement for the Coming Week

Remind your group that the point of this study is to pray, not just to learn about prayer. Beginning the next lesson early in the week (preferably tomorrow) will allow plenty of time for the prayer practices.

Lesson 2

The Holy Spirit: Our Come-Alongside Interpreter and Initiator

Leader's Guide

Key Idea: The Spirit of God helps us communicate with God by using God's written Word to initiate conversations with us and interpret God's heart and ways for us.

As you pray for your group during the week, ask God to give them open hearts and minds to consider new ways of relating with Him and especially hearing from Him. Ask the Holy Spirit to confirm to each of their hearts—and your own as well—that He seeks to make life with God very personal as He uses God's Word as a springboard to deeper conversation and relationship. Ask God to help your group with time management so they will have time to do the prayer exercises (note: you will be invited to do prayer practices four days this week, so do allow time for these).

Opening Prayer

Thank God that for giving you His Holy Spirit to help you understand, receive and personally interact with God on the basis of His written word—so that you may know Him and enjoy life-giving relationship with Him through prayer. Ask Him to help your group embrace this incredible invitation and have receive all that He offers to you.

Discussion Points

Think about It. Invite the group to share their thoughts.

Invite God to Speak. Ask the group to share how their times of meditating on God's word using *Lectio Divina* went for them. How was it different from the usual way they read and pray Scripture? Did they sense the Holy Spirit's participation with them in these times of prayerful reading? What did He say or do? How did they respond?

Going Deeper

Ways the Holy Spirit comes alongside us as we interact with Scripture. Which of the bulleted points (page 3) stuck out to your group? How have they experienced the Holy Spirit acting in these ways?

Question 1. How did your group see Cynthia and the Holy Spirit interacting in her story? Here are some possible answers: He got her attention at the party and initiated a topic of conversation (hospitality) there. Cynthia initiated a conversation with Him about the party and how He works through hospitality the next morning. The Holy Spirit spoke (interpreted Scripture) to Cynthia through the “coincidental” 3 John passage. The Holy Spirit continued to speak to Cynthia through her Bible's study notes. The Holy

Spirit initiated more on hospitality through her Sunday school classes time in Luke 10 on Sunday.

Invite your group to share times when they have noticed the Holy Spirit initiating with them. Also invite them to share how He interprets God's written word to them.

Question 2. There is no correct solution to these scenarios. Hopefully your group had fun wrestling with them and realizing why we need the Holy Spirit to interpret the Bible for our individual lives.

Question 3. Invite your group to share their answers. Possibilities include: help in understanding Scripture; help in using Scripture in times of temptation; nurture and comfort; wisdom from God; personal guidance; knowledge of God's will for prayer; giving us something personal to share with others; etc.

Question 4. Invite the group to share their responses. Possibilities include pride, independence from God/self-reliance, quenching, resisting, or grieving the Holy Spirit, ignorance of God's Word (not reading/studying it regularly), etc.

Your Turn. Invite your group to share their experiences. If by chance (and I hope this doesn't happen, but it might!) no one or very few people have done these, you choose one and do it in class, if time allows. If you need a refresher on how to do it, look at Appendix D. Lectio Divina works wonderfully in a group setting. This is the format Cynthia's Sunday school class used when the Holy Spirit spoke to her from Luke 10.

Closing Prayer

Thank God for stretching you and your group and for opening you up to new ways of tuning into the Holy Spirit's come-alongside work in initiating and interpreting Scripture for us. Ask God to continue to make you ever-more sensitive to the Holy Spirit's promptings, interruptions, and teachings so that God's written Word becomes more and more life-giving to you all. Close your prayer by asking the God to give your group spiritual discernment to recognize God's voice and distinguish it from all others.

Encouragement for the Coming Week

Remind your group that the point of this study is to pray, not just to learn about prayer. Beginning the next lesson early in the week (preferably tomorrow) will allow plenty of time for the prayer practices.

Lesson 3

“Did I Hear You Right?”

Leader’s Guide

Key Idea: Although God’s Word is always true, the enemy seeks to deceive us by twisting it and misapplying it to us. Discernment through the Holy Spirit safeguards us from this deception.

As you pray for your group during the week, ask God show them how the enemy may have twisted Scripture in order to deceive them. Ask the Holy Spirit to give your group spiritual discernment so that God’s written Word brings the peace, righteousness, and abundant life that intends it to. Ask God to help your group with time management so they will have time to do the prayer exercises.

Opening Prayer

Thank God that His Word brings life. Ask the Holy Spirit to give your group discernment so that the enemy cannot interfere with God’s good plans for you through His words. Ask Him to help your group bring their questions about what He is saying back to Him for interpretation and application.

Discussion Points

Think about It. Invite the group to share their thoughts.

Invite God to Speak. Invite your group to share the prayers they wrote. Can they think of other ideas of “double-edged praying?” Examples could include a taking off/putting on prayer from Colossians 3:5-17 or a good fruit/bad fruit prayer from Galatians 5:16-26.

Going Deeper

Question 1. Invite your group to share their answers and observations.

Question 2. Invite your group to share their answers.

Avoiding Deception. Were any of these enemy ruses new to your group. Invite them to share any thoughts they had while reading this section.

Question 3. Invite the group to share their responses.

Question 4. Invite your group to share their response. (Possible ways to develop discernment might include studying the whole Bible—so that it can not be easily twisted out of context; asking God to give you discernment; taking questions, hesitations, doubts about a verse or passage to the Holy Spirit and asking for clarification; asking for help from a mature Christian friend.)

Your Turn. Invite your group to share their experiences.

Closing Prayer

Thank God for the truths of John 10—His sheep know His voice; they will not listen to a stranger. Ask God to expose any ways Scripture has been twisted for you and your group and to develop greater discernment in each of you.

Encouragement for the Coming Week

Remind your group that the point of this study is to pray, not just to learn about prayer. Beginning the next lesson early in the week (preferably tomorrow) will allow plenty of time for the prayer practices.

Lesson 4

Borrowed Prayers, Part 1

Leader's Guide

Key Idea: God's written Word offers encouragement and permission to pray in ways—and with words—we might not come up with on our own.

As you pray for your group during the week, ask God invite each to talk to Him in new ways—especially when it comes to praying in pain or crisis. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any biases that prevent your group from enjoying all the different ways God has given us to talk with Him. Ask God to help your group with time management so they will have time to do the prayer exercises—and ask Him to help them to engage deeply with Him as they do so.

Opening Prayer

Thank God that His written Word teaches us how to pray and gives us permission to pray about the deepest needs in our lives. Ask the Holy Spirit to make your group time safe so that everyone feels freedom to share whatever their experiences with God have been, both this week and in the past. Ask Him to help your group take risks in praying—even as the saints of old did as they prayed prayers of faith from the heart.

Discussion Points

Think about It. Invite the group to share their thoughts. Some group members might be reluctant to share their biases. If they are slow to jump in, be prepared to lead the way by sharing your own experiences. Make sure that everyone feels affirmed in praying either/both written and spontaneous prayers.

Invite God to Speak. Ask your group to share their experiences with praying the Lord's Prayer in this manner. Do any of them think they might continue praying it like this in the future?

Going Deeper

Question 1. Invite your group to share their answers to all four parts.

a. Possible answers include: to encourage us that we can pray whatever is on our hearts to God—it's okay; that great people of God prayed honest prayers from their hearts—even when they were hurt, confused, and angry—and God heard them; to provide us with words and examples we can use when we are feeling deeply negative emotions.

b. Let your group share their answers. Be prepared to share your own answers,

too.

c. Realize that many of your group may *not* feel comfortable praying in these ways—so be accepting of where they are. Acknowledge their concerns or hesitations.

d. Let your group give their answers. Possibilities include: God already knows how we're feeling, so it's not going to surprise Him—He wants us to share everything with Him; when we're honest with God we create space for Him to meet us in our deepest places of need; God is a good Father—He wants to draw near to us when we're hurting and confused; God doesn't want us to pretend we're fine or to gut it out when we're hurting—He wants us to be real. Our honesty invites His compassion.

Question 2. Invite your group to share their answers. Can your group think of situations they are currently experiencing in which they'd like to pray more “high-road” prayers?

Your Turn. Invite your group to share their experiences.

Closing Prayer

Thank God for the people in the Bible who prayed honestly and with faith to God in all kinds of difficult situations. Ask God to help you and your group follow their examples and to go deeper in praying these prayers of the heart.

Encouragement for the Coming Week

Let your group know that the next lesson is going to stretch them by providing more biblical models of prayer—some of which they may never have considered praying. Are they ready for to step out of their comfort zones and meet God in new ways?

Lesson 5

Borrowed Prayers, Part 2

Leader's Guide

Key Idea: God's written Word invites us to pray about things we might not know to pray for on our own. It also lends us words to pray when we don't have our own words.

As you pray for your group during the week, ask God to continue to invite them to talk to Him in new ways and to find in God's written Word ways of expressing their hearts that they can fall back on in the future. Ask God to give your group members freedom to open their hearts to Him and each other. And ask God to help your group with time management so they will have time to do the prayer exercises—and ask Him to help them to engage deeply with Him as they do so.

Opening Prayer

Thank God that His written Word teaches us how to pray about everything we would ever need to talk with God about. Ask the Holy Spirit to make your group time safe so that everyone feels freedom to share whatever their experiences with God have been, both this week and in the past. Ask Him to help your group take risks in praying—even as the saints of old did as they prayed prayers of faith from the heart.

Discussion Points

Think about It. Invite the group to share their thoughts. If you have a personal example to share, make sure to do so.

Invite God to Speak. Ask your group to share their experiences. How did they personalize the prayer? Did God start to answer in any specific ways so far?

Going Deeper

Question 1. Invite your group to share what they noticed in the verses they read.

Questions 2, 3, 4. Invite your group to share their answers. Be sure to share your own as well, especially on questions 3 and 4.

Cynthia's story. Ask your group to respond to Cynthia's story. What do they think about the way God led her to pray, using His Word. Has God led them to pray in unusual ways through Scripture? What was that like for them?

Question 5. Invite your group to share their answers. Which ones of these could they have used in their lives in the future? Which ones do they see using down the road, sometime?

Your Turn. Invite your group to share their experiences.

Closing Prayer

Thank God for the ways God has broadened your group's view of prayer this week. Ask Him to help you and your group be open and alert to Him inviting you to talk to Him according to His Word. And thank Him for the words He gives you to pray when words fail.

Encouragement for the Coming Week

Then next lesson explores the idea of praying God's promises—what that means and what it doesn't. Encourage your group to ask God to deepen their trust in His goodness and love and to stretch their faith in Him and His word.

Lesson 6

Beyond Prayer Formulas

Leader's Guide

Key Idea: Praying relationally in dialogue with God keeps us from approaching prayer as a formula.

As you pray for your group during the week, ask God increase their desire to know Him relationally and to increase their confidence in His goodness and willingness to respond to their prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to give them a deeper desire to read His written Word in order to know Him and His ways better and pray with greater faith.

Opening Prayer

Thank God that we can know Him through the things He has told us about Himself in His written Word. Ask Him to teach and encourage your group as together you explore what it means to pray according to His will. Ask Him to help those among you who have been discouraged when answers didn't seem to come to things they prayed for in faith. Ask Him to bring understanding and peace to those areas of disappointment and to renew faith and courage.

Discussion Points

Think about It. Invite the group to share their thoughts. If you have a personal example to share, make sure to do so.

Invite God to Speak. Ask your group to share their experiences. Did they hear anything new about God's perspective on the matters they were praying about? How did His perspective differ from theirs? How does it influence the way they will pray about this situation?

Going Deeper

Question 1. Don't go over the verses one-by-one; simply notice what they noticed in general.

Questions 2. Invite your group to share their answers.

Cynthia's story. Ask your group to respond to Cynthia's story. Can they relate to her experiences in praying God's will and promises? How do the things she learned help them?

Questions 3 and 4. Invite your group to share their answers.

Question 5. Invite your group to share their answers. Other possibilities include, "Father, please draw their hearts to You" or "Holy Spirit, please help them to see the dead end of their independent ways." Or "Jesus, please pour out Your love in her heart so

she can love her husband with Your love. Let her know afresh how deep Your love for her is.”

Question 6. Invite your group to share their answers.

Your Turn. Invite your group to share their experiences.

Closing Prayer

Ask your group how this study has changed the way the a) read Scripture b) relate with God in prayer. Ask them what they have learned that they intend to continue practicing as they go deeper in their relationship with God through prayer. Pray according to the things they shared.