

Using these Bible Studies

The studies are broken down into different sections that each focus on one of St James in the City's values. We think this is a helpful way to have time together that focuses on many different areas of our lives as Christians, and not simply in getting more 'head knowledge' about God.



Live:

The foundation for spiritual growth is an intimate connection with God and His family. The questions in the section will help you get to know the members of your group and help grow that sense of family which we are called into.



Grow:

In this section, the questions are designed to bring you to a deeper understanding of the Bible and to help you consider how the truths of the Bible can impact your life.



Serve:

Nothing is more fulfilling than using your God-given gifts to serve and help meet the needs of others in God's family. This section will help make that desire a reality. You will be encouraged and challenged to take steps to serve those inside and outside of the group.



Build:

The thought of sharing our faith can be scary and can feel awkward. Don't worry: this is a common feeling! However, God wants to use you to reach those around you for Christ. This section is designed to give you and your group practical, manageable steps for sharing Christ that can become a part of your everyday life.



Love:

You were made for God's pleasure. Even when we gather as a smaller group, it is great to have the opportunity to worship and to surrender your heart to God. This could come in a variety of forms such as prayer, singing, or simply sharing what God is doing in your lives. Contribute as much or as little as you feel able to.

Introduction

This is not a one-stop shop for learning how to pray, but it is a good starting point. If you want something more comprehensive, The Prayer Course is a fantastic resource and covers everything you need. All the resources (including videos) for the 8 sessions can be found at <https://prayercourse.org/> and they make it very easy to run.

Prayer is a cornerstone of our relationship with God. Our prayer life goes through ups and downs and can often feel a world away from the simplicity of what we see in Jesus' own life. These sessions take us through some aspects of what prayer looks like in the Bible and will hopefully get you excited for different ways of praying.

Study 1:

Praying with confidence – how do we come to our Father with complete trust and how did Jesus teach his disciples to pray?

Study 2:

Blessing others – what does it mean to pray for other people and how does Paul do it in the New Testament letters?

Study 3:

Answered prayer – how do we rest in God's promises and trust him to answer prayer?

Study 4:

Praying when life is hardest – what happens when the world seems to be against you and what can the Psalms teach us in that time?

Study 5:

Praying together – how did the early church pray together and what does it mean for us today?

For further reading, the book *Prayer* by Philip Yancey gives plenty of thoughtful background to the topic.

Study 1: Praying with confidence

Live

If you had to use one skill to save your life, what would you be most confident doing? Which person would you trust the most to do something to save you?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God for the way he is a good Father to us and that we can approach him with confidence.

Grow

Read Luke 11:1-13 together.

- 11:2-4 - What different aspects of prayer can you see within the model that Jesus gave his disciples?
- In what ways do the different aspects and emphasis in the prayer provide a model for your own prayer life?
- 11:5-8 - Why do you think the friend overcomes his initial reluctance to help his neighbour?
- 11:8 - The friend gives his neighbour “as much as he needs” in answer to his request. What does this passage teach us about how and why our prayers are answered?
- What does 11:9-10 teach us about prayer?
- In what ways does this passage help you to be more confident about prayer?
- What practical steps do you need to take (individually or as a group) to develop your prayer life?

Build

How might a confident prayer life help us in reaching out to those who don't yet know Jesus?

Serve

Serve each other by praying in pairs for each other to persist in getting to know God better and to be persistent in prayer. Work out how to do this practically and hold each other accountable too.

Prayer

Close in prayer: pray that as a group God will bring more and more confidence in prayer as you pray for others and claim God's promises.

Pray the Lord's Prayer line by line, leaving space to pray after each line.

Leaders Notes

The following is a brief analysis of the key points in the Lord's Prayer:

- "Father" implies intimacy with God, as a child would address their parent: we can talk to God with intimacy. Despite who God is, he is approachable and sees us as his children.
- "Hallowed" (NIV) means "made holy"; the phrase "hallowed by your name" means we should approach God with reverence, aware of his nature and character. Also, it suggests that God's name will be revered as holy by others if they see his character glimpsed in our lives.
- "Your kingdom come" means that in the present those who pray should long to see Christ's rule realised in our lives, and they long for the future reality that Christ will finally come and ensure that his will is perfectly done.
- The prayer moves in 11:3 from a focus on God's character and the outworking of his purposes to a prayer for the provision of our daily needs ("daily bread"), emphasising our continual dependence on God. This discourages us from being arrogantly self-reliant or forgetful of his constant provision.
- The final part of the prayer (11:4) demonstrates that we can confidently approach a merciful God for forgiveness, and in being forgiven find the grace of God to forgive others.
- The closing request, "And lead us not into temptation" (NIV) does not mean that we ask God not to tempt us, for he does not tempt us to sin (James 1:13). Instead it implies that in our weakness we come to God, recognising the temptation around us, to ask that we might be able to resist the temptations we face and so lead a holy life.

Other notes:

- To provide food and hospitality to a visitor was expected practice in Jesus' culture. The friend probably lived in a one-room house, so to get up to provide the bread would have awakened the family. Because the first friend persists in asking, thereby demonstrating the seriousness of his need for bread, his request is answered.
- How prayers are answered is a complicated subject. As with the parable of the widow in Luke 18, God is not being likened to a grudging friend, an unkind father or an unjust judge in the way that he answers our prayers. The parable says effectively, "If a human is like this, think how much kinder God is." God's response to prayer is not because he has to be pushed into it but because he wants to give to us and to use us in accordance with his will.
- Note that the words *ask*, *seek* and *knock* are continuous tenses, that is, they imply *constantly* asking, seeking and knocking. Also, the three words imply degrees of intensity. First you ask, then you seek, then you knock. The underlying issue is similar to that in 11:5-8: if we really seek God's will and want to see our prayer answered in line with his will, we should constantly pray.
- Prayer often involves spiritual warfare. Because of the importance of prayer in our relationship with God, Satan will do his best to undermine individual and group prayer. Group members can do practical things to help each other pray, for example, by meeting one-to-one with another person in the group to pray regularly.

Study 2: Blessing others

Live

If you had £10,000 given to you today, what would you do with it?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God for making us in his image, being born as one of us in Jesus, and for saving us.

Grow

Read Ephesians 1:15-23 and 3:14-21 together.

- Why is Paul praying for those he is writing to?
- What themes run through Paul's prayers in the two passages?
- In what ways are these prayers similar to the prayers we pray for each other, and how are they different?
 - Do we ask others to pray prayers like this for us?
 - If we used these prayers as examples, what would praying for our friends/family/small group/church members look like?
- When have you had a hard time knowing what to pray for someone?
- What are some ways that you can use the Bible to help you pray in a specific way for people you know and for your church?
 - Other than these prayers in Ephesians, what passages might you use to help you pray?

Build

What should we pray for those who don't yet know Jesus?
How do we pray for this – what specifically do we need to pray?

Serve

What practical ways can you bless each other as a group this week? Is there someone who needs a meal, or a lift somewhere, or support making a decision? Be honest with each other and try and meet each other's needs.

Prayer

Close in prayer: spend time praying in pairs and listening to God for what he wants to say to the other person today. How does God want to encourage the other person and what does he love about them? Share any words or pictures you get for each other.

Finish by reminding each other of the promises in the two passages you looked at (and in Ephesians 1:3-14 if you want more material) and thanking God for the fact that he has 'blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ' (1:3).

Study 3: Answered prayer

Live

What are the smallest things you have ever prayed for? A car parking space? For it not to rain? Share together.

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God that he rules and reigns and always answers our prayers when we call on him.

Grow

Jerusalem, the location of the temple of God, was to the Old Testament believer the centre of their devotion (as it is for Jews today). Nehemiah, a Jew in exile, was senior official in the Persian royal court, strategically placed to be part of the answer to his prayer for the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Read Nehemiah 1:1-2:8 together.

- Based on what you know from the passage, how did Nehemiah's concerns and motives affect what and how he prayed?
- 1:2-4 - the news that Nehemiah heard drove him to definite action. What sort of news would drive you to pray with the same urgency?
- 1:5 – How did Nehemiah start his prayer? Why is this important?
- 1:6-7 – What comes next in Nehemiah's prayer?
 - Why, when praying about Jerusalem, might he have felt the need to repent personally as well as identify with the sin of others?
- 1:8-10 – What does Nehemiah hold on to in the prayer?
- 1:11-2:8 – Nehemiah responds to the problem of Jerusalem's walls (1:3).
 - What gave Nehemiah confidence to do this?
 - What did answered prayer look like in this case?
- How does Nehemiah's prayer give us a pattern for praying and expecting answers?
 - God's character.
 - Sin and forgiveness.
 - Promises and previous answered prayer.

Serve

How are we helping St James rebuild physically?
What can we offer in our time/talents to help?

Build

What do you think God is calling St James to at this point?

Prayer

Close in prayer. As a group ask God to help you focus afresh on what He has revealed of Himself in the Bible and to use that in prayer.

As a group pray that the St James' building would be used more and more for God's purposes and his glory.

Study 4: Praying the Psalms

Live

What makes you cry (either happy or sad tears)? Films, a book, the news?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God that 'What is true in the light is still true in the dark: he is good, and kind, and cares for this heart' (*Weep with me* by Rend Collective).

Grow

Read Psalm 88 together.

- 88:1-5 – What does the psalmist want from God?
- 88:6-7, 8-12, 13-17 – What are the three accusations the psalmist makes?
- 88:18 – The language here completely breaks down (it doesn't make sense in Hebrew). Sometimes, our words fail us. Have you ever felt like this psalmist felt?
 - When?
 - What was your response – how did you deal with it?
- Is there any hope in this Psalm?
 - Read Psalm 89 (or at least 89:1-8). What does Psalm 88 now seem to say when you read these two psalms next to each other?
- How can our prayers help when we are feeling like this?
 - What do the words of Psalm 88 (and others like this) do?

Serve

Do you know anyone in church or the small group who is going through a very tough time? Can you help them, and if so, how?

Build

Is pain and suffering in others a chance to show God's love? Are psalms like this helpful or unhelpful to use with non-Christians?

Prayer

Close in prayer. Pray for those who you mentioned are hurting. Perhaps use the words of Psalm 88 as part of your prayers. Make sure you also pray with hope and remembering the character of God!

Study 5: Praying together

Live

What have been the best experiences of living with other people, and what have been the worst?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God for making us one body – for our brothers and sisters in church at St James and around the world.

Grow

Read Acts 4:23-31 together.

- Peter and John have just been released from prison by the religious authorities for preaching about Christ and performing a miracle. In what way(s) is the early church's response to such persecution surprising?
- What does the passage teach us about the unity of the believers?
 - What did praying together do for the Christians in this situation?
- 4:29-30 - What were the believers' priorities and attitudes?
- 4:31 – Is this answer to prayer usual?
 - Why did God answer in this way?
 - How do we know when God answers our prayers?
 - What was the result of them praying together?
- Do you find praying with others easy or difficult?
 - Why?
 - What can make it easier and harder to pray with others?
 - What usually happens when we pray together? Is it the same or different as we read here in Acts?

Serve

How can prayer ministry and praying together be improved at St James?
What can you do about it?

Build

The early church grew after praying together. What areas of St James do you want to see grow? Split up into pairs and pray for those things.

Prayer

Close in prayer: pray for unity in your small group and at St James. Pray for God to grow his kingdom and to use his people to do that. Pray for boldness in your own witness to others.