

Spiritual Formation



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Leader's Guide

How to use "Spiritual Formation" by SMALLGROUPS.COM in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to SMALLGROUPS.COM. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you train and direct the leaders of your small-groups ministry. Selected by the editors of Ministry Resources at Christianity Today International, the material in this download comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

SMALLGROUPS.COM Training Themes are not just another program. Each theme contains materials on the topic you choose—no tedious program to follow. The materials work when you want, where you want, and the way you want them to. They're completely flexible and easy to use.

You probably already have regularly scheduled meetings with small-group directors, coaches, and leaders. SMALLGROUPS.COM Training Themes fit easily into what you're already doing. Here's how to use our material during your training meetings:

1. Select a learning tool. In this theme of "Spiritual Formation," you'll find multiple types of handouts from which to choose:

- interview
- assessment tools
- case study
- devotionals
- how-to articles
- activities
- resources
- sample retreat

2. Select a handout. Suppose, for example, you have decided that your board or team needs to assess its understanding of church membership. There are two assessment options in this theme: "Guidelines for Effective Prayer" (p. 3) and "Winsome Faith" (p. 6). From these options, select the one that best fits what you want to accomplish.

3. Photocopy the handout. Let's say you selected "Guidelines for Effective Prayer" Photocopy as many copies as you need—you do not need to ask for permission to photocopy any material from SMALLGROUPS.COM (as long as you are using the material in a church or educational setting and are not charging for it).

4. Prepare for the discussion. We recommend you read the Scripture passages and identify key discussion questions. How will you apply the principles to specific decisions your church is making?

5. Lead the discussion. Most handouts can be read within 5 minutes. After you have allowed time for reading, begin the discussion by asking one of the provided questions. Be ready to move the discussion to specific issues your church is facing.

Most SMALLGROUPS.COM handouts can be discussed in 15 or 20 minutes (except the Bible study, which may take longer). Your board, committee, or team will still have plenty of time to discuss its agenda.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at Smallgroups.com.

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Time for God

Making room for the eternal.

Colossians 4:2; Psalm 84

*The point of all the spiritual disciplines is to know God, to delight in and to enjoy his presence. In this interview, Richard Foster, author of *Prayer and Celebration of Discipline*, and the late Henri Nouwen (d. 1996), author of *Wounded Healer* and *The Greatest Gift*, help church leaders deepen their conversation—and thus their relationship—with God.*

Many church leaders feel trapped by busyness. How do they find time to develop their relationship with God?

Henri Nouwen: Our culture tells us, “Do as much as you can or you’ll never make it.” I’ve discovered I cannot fight the demons of busyness directly. I cannot continuously say “No” to this or “No” to that, unless there is something ten times more attractive to choose.

The only hope is to find something so obviously real and attractive that I can devote all my energies to saying “Yes.” One such thing is when I come in touch with the fact that I am loved. Once I have found that in my total brokenness I am still loved, I become free from the compulsion of doing successful things.

So many of the spiritual disciplines are really about prayer.

What is prayer?

Nouwen: Prayer is first of all listening to God. It’s openness. God is always speaking; he’s always doing something. Prayer is to enter into that activity. Prayer in its most basic sense is entering into an attitude of saying, “Lord, what are you saying to me?”

Richard Foster: The problem with describing prayer as speaking to God is that it implies we are still in control. But in listening, we let go. Real intercession is what comes out of listening. People are tired of hearing about “ten steps that will change your life.” That isn’t where it’s at, because then people tend to focus on the steps instead of hearing and obeying God.

What can we do to help us center our thoughts on God?

Nouwen: People who live a spiritual life become very sensitive to their surroundings. It’s important not only to set aside time to pray but also a place to pray. I have a special place to pray, and I spend a predetermined amount of time in this space. The only reason to be there is to pray. After the time is up, I can say, “Lord, this was my prayer,” even if my mind was full of confusion.

How can other people, such as a spiritual director, help draw us to God?

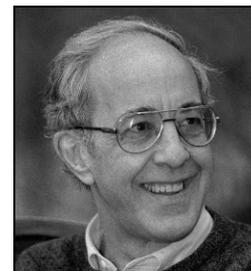
Foster: Spiritual directorship is a Christian idea. It means having someone who can read my soul and give me guidance in my walk with Christ. Many churches call it discipleship.

Nouwen: The church itself is also a spiritual director. It tries to connect your story with God’s story. Just to be a true part of this community means you are being directed and you are being guided. The Bible is a spiritual director. People must read Scripture as a word for themselves personally, and ask where God speaks to them.

Finally, individual Christians are also spiritual directors. A spiritual director is a Christian man or woman who practices the disciplines of the church and of the Bible, and to whom you are willing to be accountable for your life in God. ➤



RICHARD FOSTER



HENRI NOUWEN



Time for God *continued*

How do you find such a person?

Nouwen: If you are seriously interested in the spiritual life, finding a spiritual director is no problem. Many are standing around waiting to be asked. However, sometimes we don't really want to get rid of our loneliness. I constantly see this in my life. It is so beautiful to realize we don't have to be lonely if we really want to become open to the dependency of God's love and the love of our fellow men and women. It isn't an easy dependency. If you allow someone to love you, that love will take you to painful places. But it is also true that if I want to break out of my loneliness, God will send me his angels.

Another way to get to know God in a deeper way is through extended time away alone. What should happen at a spiritual retreat?

Nouwen: One word: prayer.

Foster: You don't always have to go away for a retreat. You can have retreats by arranging a room in your house for prayer and quiet reflection. I know one family that has a chair designated as a quiet chair. But a silent period spent listening to God is indispensable.

To Discuss

1. What is an example of saying yes to something compelling in order to combat busyness?
2. What strategies have you found helpful in carving out time to pray?
3. How can we encourage our leaders to deepen their prayer lives?



Guidelines for Effective Prayer

9 principles for including God in church decisions.

Ephesians 4:16; Philippians 4:6-7

For each guideline, mark how you think we're doing as a board or committee:

How are we doing?

1. Prayer must be dynamic and flowing. That simply means the leader must be sensitive to the uniqueness of each meeting. Some nights we pray for forty-five minutes; other nights only two.

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2. God is looking only for simple, sincere prayers. God desires conversation that honestly expresses the hearts of his people.

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3. It is corporate prayer. Little happens if everyone prays silently. We encourage people to jump in with conversational prayers.

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4. Focus on attitudes and perspectives. The point of prayer is to make us more sensitive to God's will. We're not looking for a "word from the Lord" on whether to buy a specific brand of copier. We'll decide that later out of the change he works in us through prayer.

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5. Everyone must want God's will. This is too often assumed, but it's easy in the routine of meetings to think that my first inclination is also God's desire.

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6. No one person has a monopoly on God's wisdom. As we pray, we look for God to lead us "by every supporting ligament" (Eph. 4:16). Wisdom in the body of Christ is always manifested corporately. If people aren't responsive to the insights of others, they can't be part of a team.

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7. Everyone agrees not to use prayer to manipulate others. Nothing kills prayer faster than prayers aimed at the people in the room rather than at God. As the angel reminded Joshua, God is not on anyone's side but rather wants to know if we are on his.

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8. We trust each other. Whenever our leadership teams had trouble praying together, mistrust was at the heart of it. Prayer flourishes only in an atmosphere of trust.

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9. Don't fear mistakes. Learning to pray has its ups and downs, but enduring them together is what being the body of Christ is all about. When struggling, we can simply say, "Lord, teach us to pray."

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—WAYNE JACOBSEN

To Discuss

1. How did you evaluate how we're doing?
2. What strategic decision that we're currently facing needs focused prayer?
3. Other than at the beginning or close of meetings, how can we include prayer as a core feature of our discussions?



Winsome Faith

5 qualities that reflect God's image.

Galatians 5:1; 22-26

When the Spirit of Christ enters us, his character begins to flow in us, and we bear fruit. Here are 5 qualities of Christ-like followers that reflect the image of God:

- 1. Joy.** Christian writer and professor Eugene Peterson observed in *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*: “There are Christians who never crack a smile and who can’t abide a joke. But I don’t meet very many of them. The stereotype is a big lie created, presumably, by the Devil. One of the delightful discoveries along the way of Christian discipleship is how much enjoyment there is, how much laughter you hear, how much sheer fun you find.”
- 2. Gratitude.** God’s Word makes clear that we aren’t just to be thankful but also to say we’re thankful, to sing it, to demonstrate it. There are times to weep. But authentic Christians model a thankful spirit in the day-in, day-out routine of life. Every sunrise, every meal (even in coffee shops), every car ride, every encounter with another human being is an occasion for gratitude.
- 3. Enthusiasm.** I greatly admired this trait in my father. Almost every morning, he’d clench his fist and say, “Boy, am I enthused!” It may not be a bona fide fruit of the Spirit, but I think enthusiasm is an important graft into the orchard. For vital Christians, enthusiastic applies to their faith.
- 4. Wonder.** British writer G. K. Chesterton said, “The world will never lack for wonders, only wonder.” The alive Christians I love take little for granted. They’ve erased from life’s curriculum the lesson of boredom over God’s masterpiece. God, to them, inspires wonder.
- 5. Kindness.** In “Edification/Demolition,” an essay in *Ragman*, Walter Wangerin recalls his encounter with two people who helped him at a time of need and reminds us how far just one drop of kindness goes: “Every time you meet another human being you have the opportunity. It’s a chance at holiness. For you will do one of two things, then. Either you will build him up, or you will tear him down.”

—SONNY SALSBUURY

To Discuss

1. Name some individuals in our church who manifest the above characteristics.
2. What specific things demonstrate to visitors that our church reflects the image of God?
3. To you, which of the above qualities is most important? Which is the most difficult to display?



God's Work in Suffering

Even in our darkest moments, God is active.

James 1:1-18; Job 42

The Case On Saturday, September 5, I retired to my study to prepare for a wedding. Suddenly as I was writing, I lost control of my hand. I called out to my wife; in a few moments I had lost my speech, my right side was paralyzed, I was unable to walk. It turned out to be a cerebral hemorrhage. Had it gone a fraction further, it would have proved fatal.

I confess my reactions to the illness were not the most spiritual. Why had God allowed this to happen to me in the midst of a busy life, and when he was apparently blessing us and the church was filled twice each Sunday?

I sank to the depths of despair. For days I could do nothing but weep. I did not question God's ability to work a miracle, but there came into my mind the query, "Have I any right to expect him to reverse the laws of nature, which he himself created, simply for my benefit?"

I found myself being attacked by tremendous temptation such as I had not known for years. The Devil took advantage of my helplessness to throw everything he had at me. Sinful thoughts, temptation to impurity, bad language were all the shattering experiences of those days.

What Would You Do? ♦ What would you be likely to think if you were suddenly paralyzed?
♦ What kinds of responses to suffering are normal, healthy? What kind are not?

What Happened After weeks of despair, one day I cried out to God, "O Lord, deliver me from this attack of the Devil. I would rather be in heaven than stay here and know the last memory my family had of me is of a man living like a cabbage."
For the first time in months, the Lord drew near to me. I had no vision of him, but a deep conviction came to my heart, in which he said, "You have this all wrong. The Devil has nothing whatever to do with it. It is I, your Savior, who has brought this experience into your life to show you two things. First, this is the kind of person, with all your sinful thoughts and temptations, that you always will be, but for my grace. I never intended to make you a better man."
"Second, I want to replace you with myself, if you will only allow me to be God in you and admit that you are a complete failure, and that the only good thing about Alan is Jesus."

That truth I had known in theory; now I knew it in experience.

—ALAN REDPATH

Adapted from *My Most Memorable Encounter with God* (Tyndale House Publishers) edited by David Enlow. © 1977. Used by permission.

Discuss

1. How does our view of God and ourselves affect our response to suffering?
2. What temptations can suffering bring?
3. What role does prayer play in suffering?



Prime Time for Prayer

Breaking out of boredom.

Psalm 51:10; James 4:7-10

The Case Board chairperson Tom had served the church for many years, yet he felt as if his spiritual life were in the doldrums. He felt cynical about church in general and apathetic about his role in the church. He felt a little guilty about being a leader. *Somebody more spiritual should be giving guidance to the church, he thought.*

One morning, while at breakfast with a friend, Tom took the risk to tell the truth.

“I’m drifting spiritually,” he said. “My prayer life is dead, and I feel critical and cynical about everything I’m doing at the church. But it’s more than a discipline problem. Frankly I’m bored with my prayers. Maybe I need to resign.”

What Would You Do?

- ◆ If you were Tom’s friend, what would you say?
- ◆ What fires up a cold prayer life?

What Happened Tom’s friend, Kirk, paused and then said, “My prayer life gets stale, too. A couple strategies, though, have helped refresh my prayers.

“I can tell my prayer life is getting stale when my prayers get vague. You know, the times I slip into prayers like ‘God, bless Amy at school today.’ When that happens, I turn to a text like Ephesians 3:14-21 and read the apostle Paul’s grand requests—‘I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.’ I let Paul’s priorities reshape my mumbo-jumbo into requests that reflect God’s heart.

“I stumbled across another strategy by sheer accident. When the stereo in my Toyota pick-up went on the blink, I found myself driving in silence. I always figured that praying while driving amounted to giving God my ‘less-than-prime’ time. But my 20-minute commute is prime time. My truck functions as a wonderful prayer closet. Of course, I pray with my eyes open! But as I drive, I can sing, cry out to God, and verbalize prayers in a wonderfully private setting.

“Taking prayer walks also works—or taking prayer runs. When I work out, riding my bike or running, sometimes, I pray as I sweat and grunt. Other times I walk and pray along the river near my home. It’s like walking with my wife—I do not think or speak words every moment of the walk. I listen, I reflect, and my mind even wanders. But I am constantly aware in whose presence I am.”

—STEVEN D. MATHEWSON

Discuss

1. What are some prayer strategies that have worked for you?
2. How does unconfessed sin affect one’s spiritual condition?
3. What assumptions about prayer affect the kind of prayers we pray?



Away to Pray

Changing the setting to talk with God.

Luke 5:15-16

Read *Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed (Luke 5:16).*

Comprehend In *Deepening Your Conversation with God*, Ben Patterson writes about Mary Slessor, missionary to West Africa in the nineteenth century. “Her work among orphans,” writes Patterson, “was nothing short of remarkable.” Yet Slessor cites not her work but her prayer as most important. “Prayer is the greatest power God has put into our hands for service,” she wrote. “Prayer is harder work than doing.”

Prayer is harder work than doing. That’s why carving out time to pray is so difficult yet so critical.

As Jesus’ ministry mushroomed, he found time to talk with God. When “the news about him spread all the more,” Jesus slipped away to pray (Luke 5:15). The Greek phrasing of Luke 5:16 suggests that getting away was a pattern of Jesus. A successful ministry does not exempt a leader from prayer. A successful ministry demands it.

How can leaders break away from the routine to pray?

Paul’s many references to his prayers (Rom. 1:10; Eph. 1:16; 1 Thess. 1:2) suggest that he set aside specific times to prayer—as apparently Jesus did. As a pastor, if I don’t budget time for study, sermon preparation, leadership development, staff meetings, and worship planning, these responsibilities receive the short end of my time. So does prayer if I fail to build it into my schedule. As the cliché goes, “If I fail to plan, I plan to fail.”

By finding time to pray in the midst of great need and busyness, Jesus modeled for us one key to spiritual health.

—STEVEN D. MATHEWSON

- Discuss**
1. What factors in our schedule work against time for prayer?
 2. What role should church leaders play in supporting the prayer life of others? How does one “hold someone accountable” for prayer?
 3. What have you discovered when you started finding more time for prayer?



The Central Work of Prayer

How prayer and work go together.

Colossians 4:12-13

Read *Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:12-13).*

Comprehend Someone once wrote an article titled “If You Are 35, You Have 500 Days to Live.” Subtract the time you will spend sleeping, working, and tending to personal matters such as hygiene, odd chores, eating, and traveling. In the next 36 years you have 500 days of leisure. If this world is all there is, then none of us should waste our time praying. We should be literally grabbing all the gusto we can get.

Of course, this affects the church. Activists that we are, we all feel there is so much to do and so little time to do it. We would do well to take our clues from St. Benedict of Nursia. He founded his Benedictine order as a reaction to the worldliness of the sixth-century church. His slogan was *Ora Labora*, from the Latin *ora*, “pray” and *labora*, “work.” He taught his followers that to pray was to work, and to work was to pray. Following that rule, the Benedictine order broke down the artificial dichotomy between work and prayer. From there they also bridged the gap between the manual arts and the liberal arts, and the physical and the intellectual. Much of what is considered beautiful nature in Europe today, particularly in France, was created by Benedictine monks who drained swamps and cleared forests.

The apostle Paul, when writing to the church at Colossae, wanted to encourage its members by telling the things being done on their behalf. He mentioned one of his colleagues, Epaphras, whom he described as “working hard for you.” Epaphras’ hard work for the church was his earnest prayers on its behalf!

Our prayer is our work! Only when that is true for us will our work be prayer: real worship, praise, adoration, and sacrifice. The classical postures of prayer—arms stretched out and hands open, or head bowed and hands folded—express perhaps the greatest paradox of prayer: that only when we give up on our work can God’s work begin and, mysteriously, can our work come to fulfillment.

Ora labora.

—BEN PATTERSON

- Discuss**
1. What does busyness and exhaustion indicate about our view of God?
 2. How does one move from discipline to delight, from prayer as an obligation to prayer as a gift?
 3. On a scale of one to 10, how would you rate our church’s prayer life? What is one way to improve that rating?



Fighting Spiritual Decay

It's critical we speak with—and not about—our heavenly Father.

Psalm 142; Job 1: 20-22

Read *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God (Ps. 42:1-2)?*

Comprehend In the autobiography of Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, he gives the account of the death of his four children (within two weeks), leaving the stricken parents in dreadful loneliness.

Even in the worst moments of this ghastly trial of faith, Father Bodelschwingh never lost contact with God, his childlike conversation with the Father in heaven never ceased, and hence, never for a moment did his conversation with God appear to yield to that dumb, leaden silence which many of us have experienced from the darkest days of our life. Bodelschwingh said later that when this happened, he learned for the first time how hard God can be; but he apparently never asked, “How can God allow such a thing to happen?” or “Why should God do this to me?”

Anybody who asks these questions is no longer speaking with God, but only about God. He is making God the topic of a discussion, turning him into a matter of debate. Then of course, the subject is talked to pieces, and God melts away in one’s hands, choked to death in a lot of words.

This did not occur at this crisis in Bodelschwingh’s life, for he did not talk about God, and he turned the very dread itself into a prayer. And in this he was following the example of the crucified Savior. Even Jesus cried out in the agony of death, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” In this uttermost depth of trial, the Crucified still addressed his Father in prayer: “My God, my God . . .,” and this cry of terrible torment is clothed in the words of the Old Testament. He spoke to the Father as it were in the Father’s own words. He was so close to the Father’s side even here—even in this extreme darkness when the face of the Father seemed to have vanished utterly.

Why is it that we have so much trouble with our prayer life, instead of finding in it the real substance and joy of our existence? Why is it that we have to force ourselves to keep company with the Father? Anybody who once makes a mere topic of God usually turns after a time to more current and immediate topics.

The reason is that prayer is no longer the native soil of our life, our home, the air we desire to breathe.

—HELMUT THIELICKE

Adapted from *Life Can Begin Again* by Helmut Thielicke (Fortress Press). Reprinted with permission.

- Discuss**
1. What good is prayer in times of deep suffering? What can we expect from it?
 2. How does one break out of the “dumb, leaden silence” that Thielicke describes?
 3. Describe a time in your life when you felt like you “kept company with God”?



How to Pray As a Group

3 helpful stages.

1 Timothy 2:1; James 5:13-18

No greater moment exists in church leadership than when men and women collectively move into the presence of the Lord, seek his face, and move out in unity. The following three-phase structure has helped our board move forward in dynamic, life-changing—and church-changing—prayer.

1. Preparation. We begin with a brief time for people to collect their thoughts in the presence of the Lord; otherwise they may be more preoccupied with what they're going to say than with God's presence. Everyone arrives at different stages of readiness. To come together before the Lord, we start with worship—a couple of familiar choruses, a moment of silence, sharing from the Scripture—varying it from session to session. This can last anywhere from thirty seconds to fifteen minutes.

2. Requests. Preparation naturally flows into a time of audible prayer. We don't try to cover a mass of token requests; we center instead on areas related to the reason we have come together. This may include personal prayer for a board member's need, but more often it covers major agenda items for which the team holds responsibility. We mingle praise with petition as we go.

3. Interaction. Out of our praises and prayers we listen for what God wants to say to us. We encourage each other to relay to the group what God brings to mind while we are praying. We're often surprised at how consistently Scriptures and thoughts are confirmed by others.

At other times we find God's presence in quietness. Prayer is not corralled into a specific slot on the agenda. Throughout the meeting, we seek God's mind as a natural part of the proceedings. Often team members pray spontaneously during the discussion or offer some insight they feel God has impressed on them.

—WAYNE JACOBSEN

To Discuss

1. What is one step we can take to integrate prayer more fully into our decision-making process?
2. What hinders prayer at board and committee meetings?
3. What decisions facing us need more focused prayer?



Where Do You Stand?

How to assess your life and work.

Psalm 139:23; Jeremiah 17:9-10

Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living. To look after and care for the soul, according to Socrates, was more important than money, honor, and even reputation. The first duty was “to know thyself.”

An essential practice for an effective leader is to examine continually one’s own life. Here are four ways to begin:

- 1. Examine the character of your life when out of the public eye.** Who am I? What thoughts do I entertain? To what private and secret activities do I give myself?
- 2. Examine the character of your life and work in the public eye.** What are my values and behaviors as a leader? To what do I give myself? What are the true results of my leadership?
- 3. Examine your motives and give each day over to God.** Protestant reformer Martin Luther taught that the last activity of each day should be to examine one’s motives and actions of the day, and then give the day to God and go to sleep. While we are out of the way in the hours of this momentary death, God may finish our work, doing for us as we sleep what we could not accomplish in our wakeful hours.
- 4. Cultivate a daily habit of self-examination.** John Wesley modeled self-examination as a continuing essential for the religious leader. In his early years he set aside time every day for the “examination.” Later, he began the practice of setting aside each Saturday for self-examination. Finally, in his later years, he developed the habit and inner clock to pause for the first five minutes of each hour to examine the hour past.

The interior life of the leader works its way out in all other aspects of ministry. The Christian leader [according to professor and writer Thomas Oden] “must not be a slave to one’s own unexamined passions.”

—NORMAN SHAWCHUCK AND ROGER HEUSER

Adapted from *Leading the Congregation* (Abingdon) by Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser.

To Discuss

1. What role does confession of sin play in self-examination? How is that different from accountability with others?
2. What is the role of the Holy Spirit as we cultivate a more active inner life?
3. How can we foster this characteristic among our leaders and church members?



An Hour in Prayer

Focus for time in God's presence.

Matthew 6:5-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:17

To structure an hour in prayer, divide each hour into twelve, five-minute points of focus. Some aspects may require only a minute; others may require more than five.

- 1. Praise** (*Psalm 63:3; Hebrews 12:15*). All prayer should begin with recognition of God's nature. Praise esteems God for his virtues and accomplishments.
- 2. Waiting** (*Isaiah 40:31; Lamentations 3:25*). Not only should we begin this time with praise, but also we should be quiet in God's presence.
- 3. Confession** (*Psalm 51:10; 1 John 1:9*). The psalmist asked God to search his heart for unconfessed sin, a roadblock to answered prayer.
- 4. The Word** (*Psalm 19:7-8; 2 Timothy 3:16*). "The commandment of the Lord [his Word] is pure, enlightening the eyes," wrote King David. At this point in the hour, read God's Word.
- 5. Intercession** (*Psalm 2:8; Matthew 9:37-38*). Our prayer now centers on intercession for a lost and dying world. This concerns praying for others with desperate needs.
- 6. Petition** (*Matthew 6:11; James 4:2*). This concerns our personal needs, opening our need to God through prayer.
- 7. The Word** (*Jeremiah 23:29; 2 Samuel 22:31*). Earlier we read God's Word; now pray God's Word.
- 8. Thanksgiving** (*Psalm 100:4; Philippians 4:6*). While praise recognizes God for who he is, thanksgiving recognizes God for specific things he has done.
- 9. Singing** (*Psalm 100:2; Ephesians 5:19*). The apostle Paul spoke of singing "spiritual songs." To sing unto the Lord is to worship God in melody.
- 10. Meditation** (*Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-2*). Meditation differs from waiting in God's presence; to meditate is to ponder spiritual themes in reference to God.
- 11. Listening** (*Ecclesiastes 5:2; 1 Kings 19:11-12*). Whether through the written Word or by the "still small voice" of the Holy Spirit, God speaks to praying Christians.
- 12. Praise** (*Psalm 150; Matthew 6:13*). We end prayer as we began it: recognizing and celebrating God's nature.

—DICK EASTMAN



Further Exploration

10 books to develop your soul.

1. **My Utmost for His Highest** by Oswald Chambers.

A collection of Chamber's convicting writings as daily devotional readings for every day of the year.

2. **Pilgrim's Progress** by John Bunyan.

An allegorical picture of a person's walk with God.

3. **The Screwtape Letters** by C. S. Lewis.

Eerily insightful into the hearts of men and the ways of the Devil, Lewis's letters between neophyte demon Wormwood and his sin-savvy uncle Screwtape challenge Christians by showing how everyday occurrences are used by the Devil to make us his instruments.

4. **Confessions** by Augustine.

Augustine's famous autobiography traces his conversion from a life of sensuality and hedonism to a spiritual awakening brought about by the mercy of God.

5. **The Pursuit of God** by A. W. Tozer.

"This book is a modest attempt to aid God's hungry children find Him," wrote Tozer in 1949 in the original preface.

6. **The Practice of the Presence of God** by Brother Lawrence.

A brother in the Carmelite order, gentle Lawrence wrote about simplicity and discovering our worth not out of what we do, but out of an abiding sense of God's daily and intimate presence.

7. **The Imitation of Christ** by Thomas á Kempis.

After five hundred years, the simple directives of a humble monk still give us deep insight into how to follow after and in the example of Christ.

8. **The Book of Common Prayer** by Thomas Cranmer and others.

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury for the Church of England (1489-1556), wrote and compiled this comprehensive book of prayers for daily life and special occasions. Its beautiful prose and honesty help draw us into passionate prayer to our loving God.

9. **The Cost of Discipleship** by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

First published in 1937 under the shadow of Hitler's rise to power, *The Cost of Discipleship* is a beautiful yet challenging prescriptive on what it means to truly accept the costly grace of God.

10. **Prayer** by Ole Hallesby.

Norwegian teacher Ole Hallesby's classic guide to prayer. He offers practical insight and encourages prayer as the primary way to cultivate our friendship with God.

This list was gathered from an article in *Christian Reader* magazine, which asked 15 top Christian leaders to identify the best devotional books of all time.

For the entire article, go to <http://www.christianitytoday.com/cr/7r5/7r536a.html>



Sample Retreat Schedule

How to create a weekend retreat on the theme of “Spiritual Formation.”

SMALLGROUPS.COM Training Themes expand easily into a retreat format. Here is a sample retreat schedule you may follow for the Spiritual Formation theme. The purpose of this retreat is to move board members and leaders to think biblically about prayer and spiritual growth.

Friday Evening

- ◆ 8–8:45 P.M. Opening Devotional: Begin the weekend with “The Central Work of Prayer,” a devotional on page 10. You can either photocopy and pass out the devotional or use the handout as your notes for the opening talk.
- ◆ 9–9:45 P.M. Break-Out Session: Hand out copies of “Prime Time for Prayer” (p. 8), a case study, and break into groups of three or four. Have each group read and discuss the case study on finding time for prayer. Reconvene for the last 20 minutes and put on a whiteboard or chalkboard all the strategies that people have found helpful for finding time for prayer.

Saturday Morning

- ◆ 9–9:45 A.M. Set the direction and tone for the day by handing out the two-page interview with Richard Foster and Henri Nouwen, “Time for God” (pp. 3-4). Discuss the questions at the bottom of the final page of the interview, and then prepare your group for spending an hour in prayer.
- ◆ 10:00–11:15 A.M. Hand out “An Hour in Prayer” (p. 15), an activity, to each participant. Explain that for the next hour, there should be no talking, period. Each person should use the handout as a guide for spending a complete hour in conversation with God, and find a spot away from the others.
- ◆ 11:30–NOON. Reconvene the members of your group to hear about its experiences during the past hour. Are there any common themes? What is God saying to your team?
- ◆ NOON—Lunch.

Saturday Afternoon

- ◆ 1–2:00 P.M. Final Group Session: Close the retreat with the devotional, “Fighting Spiritual Decay” (p. 11). You can either photocopy the handout or use it as your notes. Encourage the group to respond openly to “Describe a time in your life when you felt like you ‘kept company with God,’ when you delighted in and thirsted for him.” Close the weekend by challenging your group to deepen their conversation with God.

You can create similar retreat plans for any of the other SMALLGROUPS.COM Training Themes. Simply determine what you want to accomplish and select the handouts that support your objectives.