



unstuck

TEACH ME TO PRAY

WEEK 1: PRAYER, DOES IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Welcome to the week one small group guide for the **UNSTUCK: Teach Me to Pray** series. This guide is based on the sermon from Week 1 of the Unstuck series. **If you were unable to watch the sermon**, please check it out online at <https://www.firstdecatour.org/sermons/>.

This series is all about growing in our prayer life. Of course, we each know that prayer is supposed to be the ultimate expression of our personal relationship with God. In reality, however, prayer often feels like something we don't do enough, don't do well, don't know how to do, or "D," all of the above.

For many of us, prayer can feel more like a production or a problem to solve than the personal and practical connection to God prayer is supposed to provide.

In this series, we'll learn just how accessible, practical, and powerful prayer can be in your life. We'll set aside the aethereal and abstract to provide practical tools on how you can connect closely with God in the midst of a fragmented and distracted world.



START

I am excited to announce that we have some brand-new small groups joining us this fall. If that happens to be your group, we want to welcome you to this journey. Whether you are beginning your first year together or your twentieth year together, **please start this week by answering the questions below.**

- ▶ Start today by taking a minute for each person to share their favorite memory from this summer. Then, what made that memory so special?
- ▶ The purpose of any Grow Together Small Group is to help one another grow to be more like Christ. Have each person in your group share one way they hope to grow this year through the small group experience.

Now that you are warmed up let's dive in.



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As Pastor Brian mentioned in the sermon, the purpose of this series is not to teach new ideas around prayer. Instead, it is to remind us of what is true and encourage each of us to live in the truth. A critical truth about prayer is that prayer is supposed to be a simple gift. But, as Pastor Brian mentioned, when we make prayer complicated or invest energy trying to "figure prayer out," we often spend less time praying and can even get stuck in prayerlessness. The goal of this series, and each week's study, is to help us get unstuck in our prayer life and develop a deeper and richer connection to God through prayer.

This series is based on a book by Paul E. Miller called "A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World." While reading the book is not required to participate in this study, we encourage you to consider reading the book together as a group or as individuals. Below is an excerpt from the book regarding a praying life.

"A praying life feels like our family mealtimes because prayer is all about relationship. It's intimate and hints at eternity. We don't think about communication or words but about whom we are talking with. Prayer is simply the medium through which we experience and connect to God. Oddly enough, many people struggle to learn how to pray because they are focusing on praying, not on God. Making prayer the center is like making conversation the center of a family mealtime. In prayer, focusing on the conversation is like trying to drive while looking at the windshield instead of through it. It freezes us, making us unsure of where to go. Conversation is only the vehicle through which we experience one another. Consequently, prayer is not the center of this book. Getting to know a person, God, is the center."

- Miller, Paul E. A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World (p. 8). The Navigators. Kindle Edition.
- ▶ Please remember that your small group is a judgment-free zone and authenticity is incredibly important. The goal is not to impress one another but to be honest with one another. Only when we are authentic can we really grow. With that in mind, please have each member of your group describe their prayer life. How often do they pray? What joy have they experienced in prayer? What frustration have they experienced with prayer?
- ▶ From there, ask each person to reflect on the passage above. How does this passage intersect with their understanding of prayer? How could this passage help frame their perspective on prayer differently?
- ▶ With all of this in mind, have each person share one change they would like to experience in their prayer life over the next few weeks and what they can begin to do today to pursue that change.



READ MARK 9:14-29

Pastor Brian focused on this phrase in verse 24: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" This man was leaning into the faith he did have, trusting Jesus to fill in and build up the faith that he wanted more of. Whether we are just beginning our faith journey, or we've been faithfully following Christ for years, this prayer is relatable: "God, I believe, please deepen and build that faith."

However, as Pastor Brian said, Jesus addressed another issue in verse 19 of this passage that is so prevalent in our culture. Take a minute to re-read that verse. While Jesus was speaking to his first-century audience, his comments could be easily directed toward the cynicism of our culture today. Unfortunately, we live in an unbelieving cynical generation.

In Chapter 8 of "A Praying Life," Paul E. Miller addresses the impact of cynicism on our prayer lives:

The opposite of a childlike spirit is a cynical spirit. Cynicism is, increasingly, the dominant spirit of our age. Personally, it is my greatest struggle in prayer. If I get an answer to prayer, sometimes I'll think, It would have happened anyway. Other times I'll try to pray but wonder if it makes any difference. Many Christians stand at the edge of cynicism, struggling with a defeated weariness. Their spirits have begun to deaden, but unlike the cynic, they've not lost hope. My friend Bryan summarized it this way: "I think we have built up scar tissue from our frustrations, and we don't want to expose ourselves anymore. Fear constrains us."

Cynicism and defeated weariness have this in common: They both question the active goodness of God on our behalf. Left unchallenged, their low-level doubt opens the door for bigger doubt. They've lost their childlike spirit and thus are unable to move toward their heavenly Father.

- Miller, Paul E. A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World (p. 63). The Navigators. Kindle Edition.

As Pastor Brian said, we live in a culture that seems to force us to choose between naïve optimism and cynicism. Yet, in the midst of that culture, God calls us to be people of faith who trust him. One of the primary ways we lean into trusting God is through connecting with him in prayer.

- ▶ As you reflect on Mark 9: 14-29, what word, phrase, or idea jumps out to you and why? Why may God be drawing your attention to that word, phrase, or idea?
- ▶ As you think about this passage from Mark 9 and the passage from A Praying Life, can you think of ways that cynicism or defeated weariness have impacted your prayer life?
- ▶ What does it look like to trust God in a culture of cynicism? What are ways you can do that this week?

As you close your group time today, take the time to share prayer requests with one another. Write these down, and following group time, have someone in the group distribute the list to the rest of the group. As you connect with God in prayer this week, take time to also pray faithfully for one another. Next week, plan to share what God has done with these requests.

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