A Word to Small Group Leaders

This guide has been developed to accompany ***The Only Prayer You'll Ever Need: Unleashing Your Best Life***. There are seven petitions in the prayer, so this guide has been set up for a seven week small group conversation. However, it could easily be set up for ten weeks. Summaries of the first two chapters and of the last chapter which are included below can provide additional materials that could be used. For a seven week study, the leader will want to ask group members to read the first three chapters in advance of the first meeting. The assignments from that point are simply a chapter a week, and the last session should also include the last chapter on listening.

In the first meeting, the leader may provide a brief summary of the first two chapters as the study begins.

The first chapter suggests that prayer is a conversation, not a set of requests or petitions of God. Understanding prayer as a conversation invites us to lay down some unhelpful images we may bring to prayer, and think of it more as an ongoing conversation that is part of a relationship.

It also suggests that the topics of the conversations we have with God are also the most important conversations we can have with others. In a world where people often gravitate toward those who agree with them, we need to elevate the conversations. The Lord's prayer, with its topics of perspective, hope, trust, life, generosity and forgiveness, self-awareness, and gratitude invites us to talk about our aspirations rather than differences. Such conversations can help build bridges and relationships. People of faith share a common imperative to extend not merely tolerance but hospitality to the stranger. The prayer gives us the subjects for seven conversations.

The second chapter is about the Lord's prayer itself. It addresses the question of how it is that people use different words when reciting the Lord's Prayer in different traditions and that the differences, while sometimes awkward, aren't truly significant. Then the chapter turns to the structure of the prayer with its seven imperative verbs, and that the prayer invites us into three alignments, invites us at its center to pray for our life, and then gives us three assignments.

The second chapter concludes with the important observation that the Lord's prayer is a prayer we make for "us," even when we make it alone. It is not a prayer for my petitions. It is a prayer for our petitions. It reminds us of our relationship to others and our responsibility to and for one another even as we pray to God.

Chapters three through nine contain the seven petitions of the prayer. There is a separate guide for each of the petitions that is available on the website **douglaskfletcher.com** that can be shared with the participants. What is typically called an address or introduction "Our Father…" is included in the first petition. What is often described at the end of the prayer as a closing "for thine is the kingdom…" is included in the seventh petition.

The seventh session on gratitude should also include some reference to the subject of chapter 10, a chapter on listening. A conversation presumes both speaking and listening. The chapter invites us to consider how we can give attention to listening. A routine or discipline may help create intentional space. The expectation that God is speaking into our lives changes everything.

As you go through the seven petitions, remember that there are more questions here than you could possibly use. You don't want to use them all. That would move a conversation into a forced march and miss the opportunity of the time together. You can pick a question or invite the group to pick a question from a category. Or you can come up with a group question or invite individuals to speak to a question in the category which moves them. You will have no difficulty in filling the time. More questions are offered with the guide for each chapter than could possibly be used. The questions are offered to help as a guide and to help the leader not to feel anxious.

More important are the categories of questions which can help create a sense of direction for each session. The opening questions can ensure that everyone gets to speak and invite engagement. The questions about our experiences invite self-reflection. Here the leader needs to make sure no one person or story dominates the experience of all. The questions about the prayer invite our reflections on what we may have learned or newly considered. The last questions look forward and are about our aspirations, the people we want more to become.

As a leader, you have an important role and privilege in helping to facilitate seven small group discussions about our conversations with God. It is important that you are able to listen as well as be sensitive to the group. Having thought through a plan for four questions, one from each category, can help the leader to be more relaxed and engaged. There may even be a plan for some backup questions, if the suggested questions don't work well. It is also important to pay attention to the time. The leader may need to move things along, or ask for another person's thoughts in order to move things along.

The desired experience of the group is not a study, but a conversation. After all, the prayer itself is described as a conversation. Having conversations about a prayer that Jesus taught us to pray and about the aspirations it prompts in us is about sharing sacred space and about discipleship. It is a privilege to be a part of such a story.