

## Welcome

### Sharing of Praises & Petitions

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## Open in Prayer

### Building on a Solid Foundation

#### Read:

*"These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock. But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards." (Matthew 7:24-27 The Message)*

*"The BIBLE is God's chart for you to steer by, to keep you from the bottom of the sea, and to show you where the harbor is, and how to reach it without running on rocks and bars" **Henry Ward Beecher***

#### Discussion:

1. If the Bible is the foundation of your spiritual life, how stable is your spirituality? Explain.
2. What is an ideal Bible (reading/studying) goal for an adequate foundation?
3. What gets in the way of you reading and studying as much as you would like?
4. What is a realistic goal of building a solid Biblical foundation?

#### Read:

*Liberation theology and feminist biblical critique have shown that the Bible, in order to empower all people, must be read with new eyes from the vantage point of oppressed peoples. When we read the Biblical stories through today's experience, they come alive with new relevance. **Rev. Nancy Wilson***

*The Bible was never meant to be a weapon for the churches, but a voice of God and a blueprint of God's redemptive plan. The Bible, when taken out of context, has the power to wound, scar, and destroy; but when appropriately and contextually used the Word of God offers healing, wholeness and eternal peace. **Sharon Henry***

#### Discussion:

1. When you think of reading and studying the Bible more do you feel
  - Excited?
  - Anxious?
  - Lost?
  - Afraid?
  - Intimidated?
  - Other?
2. Discuss

**Preparation:** Create multiple sets of two cards that say the following:

**Card A**

*Task 1: Find out the other person's favorite childhood toy by asking relevant questions. Don't stop asking questions if you don't get the answer right away.*

*Task 2: Find out the other person's favorite pet or, if they had no pet, their favorite movie*

**Card B**

*Task 1: Do not answer any questions, rather think reflectively about their question, then repeat one phrase below (a different one each question – repeat if necessary)*

- A. We're having great weather
- B. Can I have a hug?
- C. Do you like my shirt?

***If the other person says the word 'Pound', answer their question.***

*Task 2: Answer the questions you are asked by the other person.*

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**Open in Prayer**

**Opening Exercise**

Instruction: Split into groups of two. If there is an even number of people in the group (including the CARE leader) the leader will be in a group and take Card B. Hand out a Card A to one member in a due and a Card B to the other. The other person should not see the card the other person is holding.

Read this: "Follow the instructions on your card. Do not give up – keep at it – if one question doesn't

work, ask another – get creative – you **may** be surprised. That’s the only hint you’ll get” - allow 1 minute for each task.

### Discussion:

5. How did task 1 feel for you?
6. Did anyone get their Task 1 question answered? If so, why do you think your question was answered?
7. After having experienced task 1, how did the second task feel for you?
8. Do you relate to prayer more as Task 1 or 2? Why?

### Introduction:

Last week’s discussion was focused on the discipline of Bible Study. We focused on the importance of continued Bible Study as well as the benefit of being able to read God’s Word with new eyes. As much as the Bible can be used by others to manipulate God’s Word, when we read it for ourselves, as ourselves, it is truly an offering of Good News and hope. While the Bible is a love letter from God to God’s children, prayer is a way to respond in and communicate love. Today we’ll focus on the importance of prayer and explore the practices and purposes of prayer.

Prayer is, in its simplest form, communication with God. While supplication (or what we call prayer) is us talking to God, meditation is listening for God’s voice. **1 Thessalonians 5:17-18** says *"Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

### Discussion:

1. Is it possible to **always** be in prayer? How do we pray **without ceasing**?

Author and theologian, Frederick Buechner (Beak-ner), once wrote, “We pray weather we think of it as praying or not. The odd silence we fall into when something very beautiful is happening, or something very good or very bad. The “Ah-h-h-h!” when the skyrocket bursts over the water. The stammer of pain at somebody else’s pain. The stammer of joy at somebody else’s joy. Whatever words or sounds we use for sighing with, over our own lives. These are all prayers in their way. These are all spoken not just to ourselves, but to something even more familiar than ourselves and even more strange than the world.”

2. How does this quote resonate with you?

## Read:

### Scripture:

*Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heaven, I will be exalted in the earth. **Psalms 46:10***

*The SOVEREIGN said to Elijah, "Go, stand in front of me on the mountain, and I will pass by you." Then a very strong wind blew until it caused the mountains to fall apart and large rocks to break in front of the SOVEREIGN. But the SOVEREIGN was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but the SOVEREIGN was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, there was a fire, but the SOVEREIGN was not in the fire. After the fire, there was a quiet, gentle sound. When Elijah heard it, he covered his face with his coat and went out and stood at the entrance to the cave. Then a voice said to him, "Elijah! Why are you here?" **I Kings 19:11-14 (NCV)***

## Discussion:

1. Does anyone want to share an earthquake moment in which God spoke you?

*Sometimes we expect God's voice to be revealed in big or resounding ways – but God is speaking in the silence. If God's going to communicate to us with an internal earthquake – we're going to hear it whether we're listening or not – but if God chooses to respond through a gentle whisper, we need to be prepared to receive that too.*

2. How many of us actually take time to purposefully meditate on God and God's word?
3. What does that time look like to you – for those who do?
4. Of course, it is very rare that we hear God's voice audibly – but what are some other ways we may hear God speaking to us?
5. How can we avoid distractions in our time of meditation?

## Read:

### Scripture:

*"Is any one of you in trouble, you should pray." **James 5:13***

*"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: That if we ask anything according to God's will, God hears us." **I John 5:14***

*"Now this is the confidence that we have in God, that if we ask anything according to God's will God hears us. And if we know that God hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of God." **I John 5:14-15***

**Food for thought:**

*Prayer is obviously a tool that can get us help when we are in trouble, bring our requests to God, and reminds us of God's will. Why don't we pray more – or at least with more purpose. At new student orientation at Bethany Bible College, one faculty member started to lead us in opening prayer and said, without thinking, "God, thank you for this food." How awful would it be if our conversations were that monotonous?"*

*"No matter what the actual content of our prayers, in prayer God calls us to trust, to rest in God. When we pray, we lay down our burdens before the throne of Grace. Whether we pray for ourselves or others, we put ourselves or those for whom we pray to rest in God's hands. ...*

**Harriet Crosby**

**Discussion:**

1. How can we keep our prayers relevant and meaningful?

**Read:**

**Food for thought:**

*In the 1993 movie Shadowlands, C.S. Lewis' wife is dying of cancer. After his wife has shown some improvement, the priest references God answering Lewis's prayer and he replies, "That's not why I pray, Harry. I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God, it changes me.*

*Let's conclude with prayer today – that God would change us as we seek an active life of prayer and meditation.*

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**Ideas for  
implementing  
new prayer  
times:**

**Wake up 30 minutes earlier.**  
Use the extra time as your  
“Time Apart” to pray.

**Split your lunch time in ½.** Go  
to your car or another quiet  
spot, and spend the 1<sup>st</sup> ½ of  
your lunch break seeking God.

**Other people take *Smoke  
Breaks*.** Take a few 10 minute  
*Prayer Breaks* throughout  
your work day.

**Pray as you go!** Designate  
certain events as prayer time.  
Driving to work, laundry, and  
other mindless activities are  
perfect opportunities to get lost  
in the Lord!

**Turn off the radio or TV.** Pop  
in a worship CD that you know  
moves you and take this chance  
to worship and pray.

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*(remind the group that this is not just a request or praise to be prayed for this night, but for each group member to bring to prayer throughout the next two weeks. It is a time of sharing concerns and exciting things going on in group members' lives.)*

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## Open in Prayer

### Building on a Solid Foundation

#### Introduction:

*The last two weeks of CARE Group nights we have been talking about foundations of a spiritual life. The first two spiritual foundations covered were 1) reading and studying God's Word and 2) establishing habits of prayer and meditation. The third and final foundation in this series is fellowship. It can be a powerful revelation to realize that our interactions with each other are just as important in knowing God as prayer and Bible study.*

*Fellowship is one of those words in the 'Christianese language' that we can assume everyone understands – but the meaning can often be vague and have duplicitous meanings depending on the person is referring to the word.*

#### Discussion:

- Share your definition of fellowship with the group.
- Compare and or contrast 'fellowship' and 'social relationships'

#### Read:

you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Phillipians 2:1-4 (Message Bible)

Let us consider how we can stir up one another to love. Let us help one another to do good works. Let us not give up meeting together. Some are in the habit of doing this. Instead, let us cheer each other up with words of hope. Hebrews 10:24-25a (New International Reader's Version)

To many people, a personal relationship with God is just that – personal... exclusively personal... “Leave me alone, it’s my life” personal. But these scriptures would seem to indicate that spiritual growth and commitment requires a level of relationship and accountability with others. This is two-fold in every Christian’s life – we need to be a source of encouragement and accountability to others – as well, we need to seek those who will be the same for us.

Of course, relationships can’t be forced, but I hope and pray that they will be forged in this context of CARE Groups.

### Action Plan:

3. Open the group to discussion about the previous Scripture/summary, in case someone has input, questions, or even concerns.
4. Encourage the group to visit, be it in a group of two or three, or be it the entire group interacting. Encourage them to get to know each other. If prompting or direction is needed, they may want to find out some of the following:
  - a. What’s your favorite place in the world? Have you been there? What makes it special?
  - b. What is your profession?
  - c. Who has lived the furthest from here?
  - d. Who was born the furthest from here?
  - e. Who has lived in the most States?
  - f. Is there anyone who has never been out of California?
  - g. Beach or Mountain?
  - h. Were you raised in a small family or large family?
5. Obviously some of these questions are more directed to a 1 on 1 format, some are geared for group conversation. Use some, use all, use none – this is your call.

### Closing

It might be easy for time to get away from the group. Make sure you formally close this time on time! Let the group know that the next CARE Group night will conclude this series and that the group members will be asked to fill out a brief survey so we can make sure the groups are meeting expectation and building to even further expectations.

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## Open in Prayer

### Building on a Solid Foundation - Wrapping it up

#### Read:

Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation are more than words. Learn how to apply them. You'll need them throughout your life. God's Word is an indispensable weapon. In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out. Ephesians 6:13-18 (Message Bible)

*Paul, in this letter, is talking about the armor of God – other versions refer to truth as the belt of truth, righteousness is the breastplate of righteousness, peace is the covering for your feet, faith is the shield and salvation the helmet. Notice, however, that Paul gives us simple instruction on how to put on this armor: 1. God's Word; 2. Prayer; 3. Praying for each other and lifting each other up (fellowship). The spiritual foundations we have been talking about. As Christian men and women – we literally must require these three practices in our lives.*

#### Discussion:

- Have any of the readings or discussions in the past few weeks prompted you to seek more of one or more of these disciplines (Bible, prayer or fellowship)?
- Share if you have done anything different in your prayer, Bible study or fellowship that has made an impact on you

#### Read:

The key to this three-fold foundation, however, is balance. Referring back to the Scripture we just read, notice the ultimate goal in putting on the armor of God, "...so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet." In other words, the NIV says, "you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." It is a three-legged stool (Oh, and by the way, I was planning on going here before President Obama started talking about his economic three-legged stool).

Stools can have more than three legs, but with less, it surely will not stand. With unbalanced legs, it will have a hard time supporting weight.

## Discussion:

- I think sometimes we assume our job is to attack the enemy, fight the battles, and be the conqueror or returning war hero. With Paul's perspective that sometimes the goal is just to keep standing – how does that change your view of the importance of a good spiritual foundation?
- Does the goal of being able to stand seem to indicate less pressure (not having to always pummel the enemy) or more pressure (with the thought that the battle is so hard that you can only stand) or something in the middle?

As your CARE Group leader, my job is not to lecture you or preach at you about your spiritual life. But it is to encourage you, just as I want you to encourage me. Let's continue to strive for a greater commitment and balance to our Spiritual foundation, understanding that each of these – Bible Study, Prayer, and Christian Fellowship are absolutely essential to our spiritual health and growth.

## Time of Sharing/Visiting:

This, like last week, should allow for some free time of discussion. Allow time for people to get to know each other and for you to get to know the group members as well.

## Closing (begin at least 15 minutes before CARE Group is over)

During the month of March our group will be talking a bit about Missions and we will choose a mission that our group will become involved with. This can be a mission that the church has sponsored, or something completely disconnected from what the church is doing up to this point. So, I encourage you to be praying about what you would like to see our group doing.

After March, the slate is blank. The field of CARE Group sessions is literally wide-open. We want CARE Groups to be relevant for you – and so we want to know what would be relevant for you. I would ask that you fill out the survey at the bottom of your hand out then give it back to me or put it in the offering OR go online, and fill out the survey from the CARE Group page. This will help us workout the CARE Group content and format.

Close in prayer

## Sharing of Praises & Petitions

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### Read:

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## CARE Group Survey

### I attended the following CARE Group Nights:

- Week 1 (1/11)  Week 2 (1/25)  Week 3 (2/8)  Week 4 (2/22)

I would like to see more or less of the following			
Time for Structured Discussion		Bible Study	
Time for informal Discussion		Time for events (i.e. movie night, potluck, game night)	

### I would like to see discussion or study focused on the following

(Write a number by as many topics as you wish: 3= strong interest; 2 = interest; 1= slight interest) leave blank if not interested):

Bible Characters	Books of the Bible	Biblical Themes
Specific Bible Character	Specific Book of the Bible	Money Management
Specific Bible Character	Specific Book of the Bible	Homosexuality and the Bible
Specific Bible Character	Specific Book of the Bible	Social Justice
Breaking Free from Spiritual Bondage	Spiritual Warfare	Other _____

Please write any comments on the back side of this survey.