

# The Intercessory ~~Prayer~~ LIFE

A Missional Model  
for Discipleship

A Six-Week Study

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Maxie D. Dunnam

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SOW FOR A GREAT AWAKENING

TO  
Ira Gallaway  
Joe Hale  
Eddie Fox  
Danny Morris  
Steve Moore  
Sundo Kim  
who have walked closely with me

AND TO THE MEMORY OF  
Wiley Grisham  
David McKeithen  
Buford Dickinson  
Tom Carruth  
Bill Hinson  
who were “giants in the land” of my spiritual journey



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## Preface

FOR MANY YEARS, ONE OF MY DISCIPLINES HAS BEEN WHAT I CALL “KEEPING company with the saints.” Throughout the ages there have been individuals who diligently sought the Lord; many of them have shared with us through their writing. I have “kept company with them” by reading their writings. I have discovered that these individuals share some common characteristics, among which are passionate pursuit of the Lord, a thirst for holiness, and practice of disciplines—with prayer at the center of those disciplines.

The Puritan spiritual writers and preachers talked about this as “heart-work.” John Flavel, a seventeenth-century English Puritan, gave this perspective: “The greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion is to keep the heart with God . . . Heart-work is hard work indeed.”<sup>1</sup>

The crux of heart-work is fully surrendering our wills to Christ so that all we are belongs to him, and we live his life in the world.

Through the years I have written a number of workbooks, all to assist us in the heart-work essential to keep the heart with God and to grow up in Christ.

If anyone ever assesses my contribution to the church and living the Christian life, I believe he or she will conclude that my greatest contribution is *The Workbook of Living Prayer*. It has been translated into more than ten languages and has sold over a million copies. *Abiding in Christ: The Way of Living Prayer* is a sequel to that book. The primary dynamic of living prayer is abiding in Christ, which is the primary dynamic of the whole of the Christian life. The gracious invitation of Christ is to “abide in me.” The idea of abiding in Christ offers stupendous possibility, and this workbook assists participants in making abiding in Christ the mark of *normal* Christian living.

During the past three years, I have taken the time to reflect on how my thinking and convictions about the Christian faith and way have developed. I have read through my published work over the past fifty years, along with journals and notes I have kept, and a theme has emerged: the intersection of prayer and mission, particularly one expression of prayer—intercession.

This book is an integration and summary of my thinking and of what I have written through the years. Together, we will explore intercession in the context of the whole of prayer, and also as an expression of abiding in Christ. So in a sense, this book is a sequel to both *The Workbook of Living Prayer* and *Abiding in Christ: the Way of Living Prayer*.

## PREFACE

Where applicable, I have included ideas, practices, and experiences I may have shared previously in these two books, as well as other writings; in this case, however, the primary theme is more than prayer. Intercession is something a person *does* and *may include* or *be done through* prayer, but more than intercessory prayer, we are calling for *intercessory living*.

That's where prayer and mission intersect, and I call it *the intercessory life*. This life breaks the impossibility barrier we are constantly confronting. I believe this is the life to which all Christ followers are called and that the intercessory life is the practical, daily expression of the priesthood of all believers. I invite you to read with these convictions in mind, and pray that your involvement with and response to the teaching of this book will be the *heart-work* you need to do to make you a more dynamic participant in “the royal priesthood” of which, as a Christian, you are a part.

# About This Study

**OBJECTIVE:** Participants grasp that intercessory living is the life to which all Christ followers are called, and that the intercessory life is a practical, daily expression of the priesthood of all believers.

**INTENDED AUDIENCE:** All adults

**EQUIPMENT NEEDED:** This book and a personal journal of your choice (purchased separately)

**FORMAT:** Forty-day study consisting of seven consecutive days of individual study and six group sessions (plus optional, introductory session) organized by a facilitator.

## Individual study:

- Minimum ten to fifteen minutes each day
- Opens with relevant scripture passage
- Transitions to the day's lesson, supported by either anecdotal or biblical accounts
- Reflecting and Recording—questions for participant to consider; these will also serve as a springboard for group sessions. This is a very important dimension of our forty-day journey. Remember: when this symbol, ✦ ✦ ✦, appears, do not move on until you have responded to suggestions for reflecting and recording in your journal. Usually, this will designate a time of thoughtful quietness, meditation, reflection, and writing in your journal.
- During the Day—call to action that reinforces the day's lesson

## Group sessions:

- Minimum sixty minutes each week (ninety minutes optimum)
- Introduction—designed to bring the group to order, use our suggestions or take time to cover any housekeeping, logistics, or relevant anecdotes from the previous week
- Sharing Together—gives participants time to discuss, question, and share the thoughts and experiences they have recorded in their journals on the preceding week's lessons.
- Praying Together—gives participants the opportunity to share concerns and pray about the following week.

**FACILITATOR NOTES:** To begin with, *all* participants should understand that facilitators organize, keep things moving, and serve as the point of contact for a study group; they are not “leaders” in the sense that all knowledge, teaching, and direction comes from them. This should take pressure off of any facilitator, as his or her role does not come with the usual expectations that are traditionally attached to a designated leader.

Group sessions are most effective when all participants talk about their experiences; as facilitator, you’ll need to gauge your group’s personality when incorporating any of the suggestions offered here. You especially need to be sensitive to what seems to be happening in participants’ lives; it is far more important for people to be heard and feelings to be acknowledged than for information to be shared.

Whether you opt to open with an Introductory Session (see page xv) or wait until after the first week of individual study, you’ll want to underscore a few agreed-upon specifics of confidentiality with the group during the first few sessions—if your meeting space permits, you may want to post these on the wall:

- **Keep all discussions confidential.** We gain strength and growth from sharing—this will be a safe place, built on honesty and trust. Confidentiality is expected, emphasized, and essential.
- **Treat each other with respect.** We acknowledge that our feelings are real and will not discount them in ourselves, or each other. Differences of opinion and ideas are welcome, but must be expressed in ways that do not tear down others. Respect the ideas of others.
- **Resolve conflict with maturity.** Listen attentively and wrestle with new ideas, especially those with which you disagree (the group meeting, however, should not become a debate). Should conflict arise, we will adopt the biblical approach identified in Matthew 18:15–17. Discussions will be thoughtful and move toward resolution and peace, as we are asked to do in 2 Corinthians 13:11.
- **Give everyone an opportunity.** Lift up the experiences and feelings of individuals; while the content of the study is important, applying the content to our lives and our relationship with God and others needs priority. Each one of us has a valuable voice and therefore, should have the opportunity to speak without interruption. Please give everyone an opportunity to share, if he or she desires.

- **Seek alternatives, if necessary.** If a member has sensitive needs that are beyond the scope or intent of the group, we will encourage and help this member locate an expert to meet this particular need.

If your group remains open during the entire forty-day period, you'll want to review these principles any time someone new joins the session. Group sharing is not easy; it is deceptive to pretend it is. Growth requires effort and struggle. As facilitator, don't be afraid to share your own questions, reservations, and dry periods. As participants begin to talk honestly and openly about what is happening in their lives, group meetings will become more meaningful. This means individuals will be sharing not only the good and positive, but also struggles and difficulties; therefore, everyone needs to be aware of the terms outlined previously.

## A Word on Corporate Prayer

Group members need to feel comfortable during corporate prayer; no one should feel pressured to pray aloud. Silent corporate prayer may be as vital and meaningful as spoken prayer. Times of silence, when thinking is centered and attention is focused, may provide our deepest periods of prayer.

Verbalizing thoughts and feelings to God in the presence of fellow pilgrims can be a powerful bonding experience for a group sharing a common journey. Verbal prayers may be offered spontaneously as individuals choose to pray aloud. Avoid suggesting, "Let's go around the circle now, and each one pray." You may, however, consider having the same person open and close each prayer time. Another idea might be to ask individual group members (who are willing) to pray for the specific requests made by other individual group members, both in the shared prayer time and throughout the following week. This encourages petition and intercession at a personal level, draws groups closer together, and puts intercessory living into practice.

Additional suggestions are given each week for this Praying Together time; please regard these only as suggestions. What happens in the meeting—the mood, the needs expressed, the timing—should determine the direction of the group's prayer time together.





# Optional Introductory Group Meeting

*Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him,  
because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest  
truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure,  
set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.*

—HEBREWS 7:25–26

## Introduction

Begin by asking each person to introduce him- or herself by giving their full name and what they like to be called. Informality is important. Encourage everyone to write the group members' names in the front of their books and pray for each one throughout the course of the study. Seek not to use titles, but use first names or nicknames as much as possible. It may be good to use name tags for the first two or three weeks. After all have introduced themselves, ask these three questions:

- Why did you become a part of the group study?
- What do you expect to gain from it?
- What are your reservations?

Let the discussion go on until about four or five have responded.

As facilitator, remind them that you are not the teacher; you serve as the contact person for the group and keep group sessions on track. Review the basic format of the individual study and group sessions and remind participants to bring their journals each week as they may need to refer to them during discussion. Reassure the group that during the Sharing Together component, members will be encouraged to share as they are comfortable; during Praying Together, corporate prayer will not be forced; etc. You may also ask the group for additional input and ideas, as some members may have previous experiences in similar groups and will know what worked and what didn't; this also helps customize the sessions to fit the group's personality.

And finally, as a group, confidentiality is essential; some of what may be shared could be painful or perhaps have been deeply embedded within a person for many years. Each of you owes yourself and each other a safe environment for transparency—not only does it help the person sharing; it helps the rest of the group know how to intercede on his/her behalf. You may want to spend a few minutes reviewing the confidentiality specifics on page xii. As appropriate at the weekly meetings, remind your group members of their values and commitments to each other.

## Sharing Together

If time permits, take a few minutes to read the author's preface (or, if books were obtained in advance, ask if anyone has read it already). Be willing to share with the group what is meaningful to you about his idea regarding an intercessory life; ask others to weigh in on the same. Return to the three questions asked earlier and see if, having read the preface, any of their responses have changed or been modified.

## Praying Together

Invite the group to spend a few minutes in silent prayer. Three or four minutes is a long time for people who are together for the first time, so you may want to begin with that amount of time, and increase it in the future as the group grows together. In this silence, ask the group to think of each person in the group, and what each person may have shared, and pray silently for each person.

The  
Intercessory  
~~Prayer~~  
LIFE



WEEK ONE

# Intercession in Perspective

DAY 1

## The Need to Know Our Need

*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering,  
for he who promised is faithful.*

—HEBREWS 10:23 RSV

**I**N 1991, MY WIFE AND I VISITED WHAT IS NOW THE CZECH REPUBLIC. FREEDOM from the long, painful night of Soviet oppression and persecution had only recently come. We were there to preach, teach, and offer encouragement to the faithful Christians for whom the nightmare of suffering was still a painful memory. The vivid highlight of that visit was sharing with the congregation of the Maranatha Church in Pilsen. It was one of the most exciting experiences of worship and church life in which I have ever participated.

The church's sanctuary had been turned into a university lecture hall by the communist regime, but now the government had returned it to the congregation. The risers that had been built and the student's desks were still there. More than five hundred people were present for worship, 75 percent of them younger than thirty . . . all of whom had become Christians during the past four years.

Twenty-five people had struggled as a congregation for thirty years to stay alive, and the story they told was this: For more than thirty years, eight women, only three of them now living, had prayed together every week. Six years before my visit, a young man heard about this group, joined



them, and the prayer group began to grow. That young man was now one of the pastors of the church, where hundreds were worshipping every week, and many young people who had grown up in a governmentally forced atheist culture were coming to Christian faith.

The witness of the congregation was that they were alive as a Christian congregation because of the prayers of those eight faithful women. I have never witnessed more joy, more hope, and more confidence than I saw in these people of God unashamedly dependent upon the Holy Spirit. God's presence and power were palpable. I came away rejoicing in the witness of eight women who had been faithful in intercession.

That is one of the experiences that has intensified my desire to be more faithful in intercession, an exciting dimension of our life of prayer. Let me seek to put intercession in perspective to the whole of prayer.

No less than breathing or the sucking of a newborn infant, prayer is instinctive human behavior.

Prayer is one of the deepest impulses of the human soul. In James Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie*, there is an arresting scene in which a young boy announces before his grandmother and the world that he no longer believes in God. The wise and unperturbed woman replies, "Ain't no way you can't believe in God, boy. You just try holding your breath long enough to die." No less than breathing or the sucking of a newborn infant,

prayer is instinctive human behavior. Prayer is an expression of who we basically are. Certainly, as essential as eating and drinking are to our physical well-being, praying is essential to who we are as whole persons. Though quoted often, the truth of it must not be minimized by familiarity: "For thee were we made, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee." Sooner or later, sensitive to our insatiable spiritual longing and searching for fulfillment and meaning, we begin to recognize that we cannot depend on our own resources or count on our own works to achieve meaning or grow closer to God.

## Reflecting and Recording

In his first beatitude, Jesus said those are blessed who are aware of the limitation of their own resources, and know their dependence on God is essential to find meaning and joy. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3 NRSV).

A. W. Tozer talks about Jesus’ designation of the “poor in spirit” in terms of “soul poverty,” saying “The way to deeper knowledge of God is through the lonely valleys of soul poverty and abnegation of all things. The blessed ones who possess the kingdom are they who have repudiated every external thing and have rooted from their hearts all sense of possessing. These are the ‘poor in spirit.’ They have reached an inward state paralleling the outward circumstances of the common beggar in the streets of Jerusalem.”<sup>1</sup>

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being completely self-sufficient, where do you find yourself?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
POOR IN SPIRIT			I THINK I CAN				I KNOW I CAN		



2. Lodge the term “soul poverty” firmly in your mind. What does where you located yourself on the scale above say about soul poverty in your life? Spend a few minutes reflecting on this question and making some notes in your journal.



3. One of my favorite writers, Brennan Manning, a former Catholic priest, a recovering alcoholic, and one who is painfully honest about his soul poverty, shares a challenging blessing: “May all your expectations be frustrated, may all your plans be thwarted, may all your desires be

withered into nothingness, that you may experience the powerlessness and poverty of a child and sing and dance in the love of God who is Father, Son, and Spirit.”<sup>2</sup> Can you receive a blessing like this? What keeps you from it? Make some notes in your journal.



---

### During the Day

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As you move through the day, be sensitive and seek to be attuned to the voice of need within you. In those moments, rather than trying to overcome it with your own strength, try praying a prayer that expresses your dependence on God to meet that need.

## DAY 2

# Lord, Teach Us To Pray

*He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray."*

—LUKE 11:1 RSV

PRAYER IS A LOT OF THINGS. IT IS PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING, CONFESSION AND contemplation. It is communion, simply being with Christ, deliberately recognizing and cultivating awareness of his presence. But at the core of it is petition and intercession. We can't think long about prayer without thinking about intercession. We can't pray very long or very often without our minds and hearts turning from our own needs and our own relationship with God to others and their needs. Whether self-consciously or intentionally, when we are at prayer we often speak the name of another, or in our thoughts we name others before God. Some of us may have never raised the question: What difference does it make? Or, does it make any difference? If it does, how does it make a difference? We continue to intercede even if we have never worked these questions through in our minds.

But there are many people who have given up prayer altogether because they do not understand or they have not seen that prayer makes a difference. Many who continue to pray have a great question mark about intercessory prayer. Even though they may be driven to name others in prayer, to call upon God to act in a certain way and bless others in special ways, they are not sure they have the right to do so. Who are they to tell God what to do? Despite the fact that they pray, they have grave reservations about the validity and effectiveness of it.

I learned a long time ago that I don't have to understand prayer, particularly intercessory prayer, to practice it. Though I have been involved in a number of well-known ministries, my name is probably more associated with *The Workbook of Living Prayer* than anything else. The irony is I wrote the book as a novice in prayer, not as one who was an accomplished traveler on my prayer journey but as one who needed an elementary primer for my own prayer journey. I did the same thing five years later with *The Workbook of Intercessory Prayer*, expressing grave reservations about attempting such a venture, but inspired by the use that was being made of *The Workbook of Living Prayer*.

I wrote in the introduction to *The Workbook of Intercessory Prayer*:

I am publishing this workbook on intercession with deep reservations. I'm driven by the Spirit to do it because of the need in my own life and the clamoring need of people everywhere. In doing this I risk making myself vulnerable to you who read, because I'm saying right off that in my life of intercession I have only just begun. The demands of intercessory prayer, the mystery that surrounds it, the looming questions, and my lack of total commitment and lack of proficiency—all swirl in my heart and head to intimidate and frighten me.

Intercession is neither simple nor easy. So we don't walk this path without question, doubt, and reticence. I have overcome my reservation about offering this workbook, not because I have walked the path all the way, but because I want to.<sup>1</sup>

Again, we don't have to understand prayer, particularly intercessory prayer, to practice it. So let's get a biblical perspective on intercessory prayer as the foundation for the call to an intercessory life.

We don't have to understand prayer, particularly intercessory prayer, to practice it.

The Lord's Prayer is the most common prayer in the Christian faith. Along with the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed, Martin Luther included the Lord's Prayer as one of the three essentials for every Christian to know. Whenever Christians gather for worship, this is the prayer prayed most often. More individuals pray this prayer privately than any other. It is called the Lord's Prayer because Jesus offered it as a model when his disci-

ples asked him to teach them to pray. It is a reliable guide for prayer.

Two essentials that we need to remember overarch the prayer. One, the God to whom we pray is good. Two, communication with God is possible. Surely God is holy and righteous, and we must not ignore that. The expansive witness of Scripture is that this holy and righteous God is a God of love, whose "mercy endures forever."

It is at the heart of prayer to know that God loves us, and that when we pray we are heard by Divine Love. Scripture affirms this over and over again:

- Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you; therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. (Isa. 30:18 RSV)
- But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him. (Ps. 4:3 RSV)

- But as for me, I will look to the LORD, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. (Micah 7:7 RSV)
- “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” (Matt. 7:7–8 RSV)

It is not likely that we are going to pray very much without the faith that God loves us and hears us. The above scriptural affirmations, climaxed by the promise of Jesus—*whoever asks receives, whoever seeks finds, and for the one who knocks the door is opened*—are clear calls to confident prayer.

---

### Reflecting and Recording

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1. In today's first paragraph we named some of the many things prayer is. Go back and read that paragraph. Write in your journal the words that describe prayer as you presently understand it.



2. Now, reread the paragraph and circle the words that describe the dimensions of prayer that are most often a part of your praying. Identify why you are drawn to pray in this manner.



3. How do you respond to the claim that God is good and communication with God is possible? Write a few sentences in your journal expressing your response. Do you believe it? Is there something new to you in this claim? What reservations or questions do you have about it?



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### During the Day

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Throughout the day, remind yourself that God is good and communication with God is possible. Put this truth into practice by offering brief prayers of thanksgiving and expressions of concern for others.



## DAY 3

# The Essence of Intercession: Thy Kingdom Come. Thy Will Be Done.

*In this manner, therefore, pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”*

—MATTHEW 6:9–13 NKJV

THE LORD’S PRAYER IS JESUS’ RESPONSE TO HIS DISCIPLES’ REQUEST THAT HE teach them to pray. Jesus begins, “Our Father.” This address to God supports the confidence we considered yesterday: that God is good and communication with God is possible.

This was something new. As an image for God, the term “Father” was present in Hebrew Scriptures, but it was a vague and sparsely used image. Yet this was Jesus’ most common expression for God: *Father*. The holy and righteous God whose “mercy endures forever” (Ps. 106:1 NKJV) is personal.

Praise and adoration are here: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name*. We have taken the “in heaven” words too literally. Jesus put an end to the idea that God is distant from us. We best think this way: It is not that where heaven is there is God, but where God is there is heaven. To pray as Jesus would have it is to pray to the God who is infinitely nearer to us even than we are to ourselves.

*Our Father in heaven*. Father: personal, gracious “whose mercy endures forever.” In heaven: of the nearness of mind and spirit. “God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24 KJV).

*Hallowed be Your name*. Before we start asking God for anything, or start telling God our sorrows and anxieties, we focus on who God is . . . God’s nature, glory, love, power, holiness . . . the fact of a living presence, pervading and influencing our minds and hearts. To hallow is to praise.

Also, to hallow is *to make holy*. By naming God as holy in our prayer, we place ourselves in a position to experience the majesty, mystery, and powerful presence of God.

Not only praise and adoration, but petition is here: *Give us this day our daily bread*. This is asking God for the common needs of life. “The house of prayer is not a shop where we go to bargain and barter for the gifts of God. It is the home of the Father with whom we live, where all the treasures of God’s love and concern are ours for the receiving.”<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting that in the same chapter where Matthew recorded the Lord’s Prayer, he shared the assuring words about our needs being satisfied by the Father, who pays attention to the birds of the air and cares far more for us (Matt. 6:25–26).

Even so, in teaching us to offer this petition for things such as daily bread, Jesus is telling us that we need to stay aware that we are dependent upon God for all of life. So petition is here and is naturally present in our praying.

We need to stay aware that we are dependent upon God for all of life.

Also, confession and repentance are in the prayer. *Forgive us . . . as we forgive*. Implicit here is the fact that we have sinned; we have done those things that are morally wrong, breaking God’s law. Some translations have it, “Forgive us our *trespasses*.” To trespass means to go where we don’t belong—in this case, against God, violating his will, going against persons, violating their personal rights. Whatever language we use, the very nature of forgiveness is that it has to come from beyond us, from God or from another person. Also, it has to be freely given.

The amazing truth of the gospel is that forgiveness is ours. “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19 *ESV*).

The necessary movement on our part is to accept forgiveness. Accepting forgiveness leads to repentance. Overwhelmed by the love and acceptance of God, we are sorry for our sins, so forgiveness leads to repentance. It is important to note also that receiving forgiveness is dependent upon being willing to forgive. If we are having trouble receiving forgiveness, it may be that we do not have a forgiving spirit. There are those we need to forgive before forgiveness can become real to us.

Note the logic of Jesus’ teaching in this prayer:

We begin by focusing on God: “Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.” We continue praying for the kingdom to come on “earth as it is in heaven.” The focus is still on God but is

more personal in terms of God's rule in our lives and in our community. It is "God's will" for which we are asking.

Then we pray for "bread," the very sustenance of life, believing that we are dependent upon God for all of life.

Now comes the prayer for pardon: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Notice the word *and*, linking the prayer for pardon with the request for bread. How clear the logic! Jesus knew that God offers two kinds of food: food for the body and food for the soul; one to sustain life, the other to make life free and whole."<sup>2</sup>

You may have noted that in this discussion of the "movement" of the prayer, I omitted "*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.*" I did that deliberately because our consideration of the Lord's Prayer is to make the point that intercession is at the heart of it: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done." So we consider this petition in a more expansive way.

To pray for the rule  
of Christ is a  
stupendous request.

The prayer could not be bolder. The kingdom of God means the reigning activity of Christ in human hearts and society. Wherever Christ's rule or reigning activity is experienced (peace, human justice, healing, shared love, reconciliation), there is the kingdom of God. To pray for the rule of Christ is a stupendous request. Yet, it is a request that our Lord taught us to make.

The focus is beyond us. "Thy kingdom come" flows naturally from "Thy name be hallowed." That's the reason intercession is also natural and essential. We are praying for that which we desperately desire, and which we know we are impotent to accomplish within our own resources and strength. As we will discuss more fully, when we pray for a different kind of world, a world where Christ reigns, we are led into intercession for those who are not experiencing that which characterizes God's kingdom.

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## Reflecting and Recording

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1. The kingdom of God means the reigning activity of Christ in human hearts and society. In each area, note in a few words in your journal what is missing as an expression of God's kingdom in:

<b>Your Own Heart</b> (e.g., love, peace, forgiving spirit)	<b>Society as You See It</b> (i.e., your community; e.g., justice, compassion, reconciling spirit)



2. We pray in the Lord's Prayer "Forgive . . . as we forgive . . ." Are there people you need to forgive before forgiveness becomes real for you? You may want to name them in your journal. Many times it helps to be that concrete in our expression.



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## During the Day

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If possible, call or write the person or persons you named. Assure them of your forgiveness.

Continue reminding yourself that God is good and communication with God is possible, practicing that truth by offering brief prayers of thanksgiving and concern for others.

## DAY 4

# Believe That You Have Received It

*“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”*

—MARK 11:22–26

**I**N HIS GOSPEL, MARK RECORDED THESE FEW WORDS OF JESUS THAT SUMMARIZE his teaching on prayer. Verse 24 of this passage has particular meaning for intercession: “whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

Desire is the soul of prayer. The clarity and depth of the intensity of our desire may be the measure of how effective our intercession is. In fact, intercession is a gift for the intercessor. The possession of that gift is connected with our desire for it. Andrew Murray offers a challenging word:

The law is unchangeable: God offers Himself, gives Himself away to the whole-hearted who give themselves wholly away to Him. He always gives us according to our heart’s desire. But not as we think it, but as He sees it. If there are other desires which are more at home with us, which have our heart more than Himself and His presence, He allows these to be fulfilled and the desires that engage us at the hour of prayer cannot be granted.<sup>1</sup>

In prayer the desires of our heart are brought to consciousness and are expressed. Our praying is in self-awareness bringing our desires to the Lord, believing that the Lord will grant our desires. Along with desire, the second most important secret of effectual prayer is *believing*.

Only in recent years have I made the connection between the faith that is essential in knowing God, or in receiving Christ as my Savior, and the faith that is essential for a life of meaningful and powerful praying.

In our faith journey, at a given time, or in a given time frame, we simply had to *believe* and *trust* that God loved us, had given his Son for our salvation. Our assurance of salvation and our relationship to Christ were dependent upon faith.

Jesus was rather bold and expansive in underscoring faith. “Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them” (Mark 11:22–23).

As faith was essential in our entering into the Christian life, so it is with our continuing. “Believe that you have received.” We don’t wait for a concrete expression of God’s answer; we believe we have received. It is this assurance—that God will answer—that enables us to live with the mysteries and difficulties often connected

As faith was essential  
in our entering into the  
Christian life, so it is with  
our continuing.

with how we perceive answers to our prayers. Again, faith must be exercised. Just as there came a time in our Christian walk when we had to simply believe and trust in God for our salvation, so we have to yield ourselves in faith and trust that God will respond to our praying. This does not mean that we will always get what we pray for. God will respond in ways that are good for us and will bring glory to him. Our stance is to pray believing—in faith.

Too many have lost touch with those early experiences in our spiritual journeys when we took steps of faith on our way to salvation. Remembering and rehearsing these experiences enriches our faith and gives us courage to take new steps of faith.

One other word of perspective. Intercession is a ministry of the whole church as the body of Christ. The prayer ministry of the church is in fact the very prayer life of our Lord. The writer of Hebrews describes Jesus as the one who “lives to make intercession” (Heb. 7:25 NKJV). Our Lord intercedes for us in glory, and that works itself out by the Spirit of God interceding through the groaning intercessions of God’s people.

Jack Hayford expressed it succinctly: “Prayer is essentially a partnership of the redeemed child of God working hand in hand with God toward the realization of His redemptive purposes on earth.”<sup>2</sup>

This partnership guarantees God’s presence, which is the source of all power in praying.



God's presence to us is a great central promise of Scripture. What the psalmist experienced—"though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me" (Ps. 23:4 ESV)—was given everlasting meaning as Jesus concluded his Great Commission: "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Powerful intercession comes through the person who lives consciously "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). This is the fundamental requirement of an intercessory life on which we will focus in weeks 4, 5, and 6—to abide in Christ by recognizing, cultivating awareness of, and giving expression to the indwelling Christ.

Again, unfathomable mystery is here, but mystery we can claim boldly as Christians. We have been given the privilege of being connected intimately to God, primarily through our abiding in Christ. There is unspeakable joy in this privilege, but there is also the power to be used by God as instruments of making all persons his dwelling place, and all creation showing his glory. Intercession is one of the chief channels and means of grace through which the Father does his work in the world. The awesome fact is that intercession, unceasing intercession, opens the doors of heaven for the Father's blessings to flow and for persons to become partakers of those blessings. The intercession of God's people is a huge instrument in the coming of God's Kingdom and the doing of God's will on earth as it is in heaven. (Matt. 6:10)<sup>3</sup>

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## Reflecting and Recording

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1. What are three or four of your deepest desires? Record them in your journal.



2. Spend some time examining these desires in light of the fact that *desire is the soul of prayer*. Is any of these desires greater than your desire to be in the presence of God and God's will? If these desires were granted, would you be closer to or farther from God?



3. Recall in your faith journey when you simply believed and trusted God for your salvation. What was going on in your life? What led you to your faith commitment?



4. Looking back at your reflection on believing in and trusting Christ for salvation, are you believing and trusting in that fashion in your praying? Spend some time examining your prayer life in this light. Are you moved or convicted to change this? Why or why not?



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### During the Day

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Memorizing Scripture is a discipline we need to recover. As Christians, we are to live by the Word. We can't be people of prayer without being people of the Word. Memorizing Scripture enables us to "hide" some of God's Word in our hearts (Ps. 119:11); that Word becomes a source of unexpected guidance, strength, and inspiration in times of need. Throughout these forty days, I will suggest verses of Scripture for you to commit to memory. The first comes from the Epistle to the Hebrews. This book is a great description of Jesus Christ as God Incarnate, one of us, Priest, Sacrifice, and Coming Messiah. In chapters 4–8, particularly, the writer magnificently portrays Jesus as our great "High Priest." In chapter 7, he explains that many other priests who came before Jesus were prevented from continuing as priests because they died. But Jesus was distinct, because he was divine and conquered death, so Christ as Priest continues forever. His priesthood is unchangeable, therefore "He is . . . able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (7:25 NKJV).

You may want to copy this verse on a card so you can carry it with you throughout the days ahead to read it at every opportunity or during your memorization process.

## DAY 5

# Developing Focus in Intercession

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.*

—ROMANS 8:22–27

THE DEFEAT AND DISSOLUTION OF APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA WAS ONE OF the most remarkable national developments of any country in the twentieth century. Though it is still suffering the terrible fallout of the horrendous system of apartheid, when I visited the country, I found the church alive and well in the context of challenging circumstances that would normally evoke despair. I was inspired by the commitment, the perseverance, the joyful worship, and the compassion that are unabated by what seems an impossible, unchangeable situation.

At every worship gathering I was in, they lit a candle on the altar and prayed this prayer: “God bless Africa, guard her children, guide her leaders, and grant her peace.”

Throughout the terrible and painful years of apartheid, the Methodist Church played an influential role in opposition to the oppressive apartheid system. They organized and acted; they demonstrated and worked; and they prayed. My friend Peter Storey was the bishop and longtime pastor of the Central Mission in downtown Johannesburg. On the altar in the sanctuary of that church, there was a large candle, surrounded by a coil of barbed wire. It was beautiful and ghastly at the same time—a lovely candle with snarling wire biting out of it.

Every Sunday, the people would pray for South Africa and the dismantling of apartheid. They read the names of those who were in prison in opposition to the system and committed themselves afresh to justice. Then they would light the candle. Suddenly, amid those cruel coils of barbed wire, the light would come alive, and those Christians would remember the words of Scripture: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out” (John 1:5 GNT).

That congregation knew and claimed her identity as “a city set on a hill [which could not] be hid” (Matt. 5:14 KJV). I remembered the practice of that Johannesburg congregation and the long years of persevering prayer when I joined with worshipers, continuing to pray, “God bless Africa, guard her children, guide her leaders, and give her peace.”

It is the witness of the church in South Africa, the church in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the church in China and Cuba, that prayer has been the sustaining power, giving courage, and yes, transforming circumstances.

As we move more deeply into intercession, we can imagine ourselves as a part of a great procession approaching the throne of grace. We are not alone.

To intercede is to worship God. When we worship, we move into the presence of God . . . praising, offering thanks and adoration, listening in humility, confessing and repenting. Christ is the center of our worship. Christ on the cross is history’s great act of intercession, transforming circumstances for all humankind, for all *space-time continuum*.

You see, intercession is personal and often private, but private not in the sense of individualistic, one-person activity. As we move more deeply into intercession, we can imagine ourselves as a part of a great procession approaching the throne of grace. We are not alone. As we lay our burdens on the altar, we are preparing ourselves for, and hopefully committing ourselves to, an intercessory life.

Intercession, then, is at the heart of our relationship to the Father, the risen and reigning Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Two verses combine to give the picture.

Romans 8:27 says, God, “who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (ESV). Put that with the exhilarating fact that Christ “always lives to make intercession” for us (Heb. 7:25 NKJV), and you have the dynamic work of the Trinity . . . Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God searches our minds, and the Holy Spirit becomes the intercessor of our hearts. Our intercessions, through the Holy Spirit, become one with Christ, who is the Great Intercessor in the throne room of heaven.

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## Reflecting and Recording

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1. Reread today's opening scripture (Rom. 8:22–27) two or three times and reflect on it by paying attention to the language as it relates to prayer. Does “adoption to sonship” say anything about our relationship to God, and the fact that God is good, and that communication with God is possible?



2. Does “wordless groans” suggest anything essential to our praying?



3. How have you experienced the Spirit helping you “in weakness”?



4. What does it mean by “the Spirit himself intercedes for us”?



5. Is there something “too big” for your prayers that you wish you could change on a local, regional, national, or global scale?



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## During the Day

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Continue memorizing and living with the scripture suggested yesterday.

## DAY 6

# Moses as a Model for Intercession

*Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house,  
testifying to what would be said in the future.*

—HEBREWS 3:5

ONE OF THE MOST FAMILIAR INDIVIDUALS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT IS MOSES. He was both a priest and a prophet to Israel. A priest speaks to God for the people and to the people for God. Moses did that. His notable work was that he confronted Pharaoh and led his people out of Egyptian bondage.

One of the most dramatic events in that Exodus journey was the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. Following that watershed experience, every day was marked by signs of God's guidance and care. There was manna for food that came fresh every morning. Crystal waters had gushed from rocks. A fleecy cloud shaded them from the blistering sun and guided them during the day, and when darkness came, there was a subdued but radiant cloud of light shining over their camp.

Over and over again, God displayed his providential care and Israel pledged their loyalty to God and to keeping the law. But now, barely three months since the crossing on dry land over the Red Sea, they were at the foot of Sinai, the luminous cloud/Presence still brooding over them, and Moses went up the mountain to meet with God. "When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him'" (Ex. 32:1). Aaron commanded them to bring their jewelry, and he used the gold to cast an image of a calf. The people claimed this idol as their god, and Aaron built an altar and called for a festival.

Meanwhile, up on Mount Sinai, God told Moses about this sinful action and commanded him to go down at once and confront this "stiff-necked" people (Ex. 9) who were acting so perversely. After outlining how Moses was to confront the people, God said to Moses, "Now leave me alone

so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation” (Ex. 32:10).

Moses could not bear the thought. Even with the promise that he, Moses, would be protected and in some other way “made into a great nation,” he was not willing to accept God’s verdict without an argument, without interceding on behalf of this “stiff-necked people” for whom he had already risked everything to lead.

But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. “LORD,” he said, “why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’” Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. (Ex. 32:11–14)

How we perceive God’s nature determines how we pray. Moses was bold in his intercession because he knew God’s nature and character. So, he interceded, reminding God of God’s covenant,

and in verse 14, we have this surprising word in the story: “Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.”

How we perceive God’s  
nature determines how  
we pray.

Some who think they have to be rigidly consistent in a description of God as sovereign, transcendent, and immovable might want to downplay this verse as an unimportant detail in the story, a vestige of an outgrown

phase of religion. But not so; this is revelation and is at the very heart of the story.

The grand narrative of Scripture is of a God of mercy, one who hears the prayers of God’s people and responds in compassion. One of the ways you can read the history of Israel in the Old Testament is that of God getting angry at Israel, threatening to punish, to abandon, even to destroy her, but—remembering the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—he relented, forgave, and took Israel back.

We must remember this when we pray. Moses appealed to the nature of God to keep faith with God's promise and covenant. He knew the history and character of God; indeed, he had been an active part of that history. He also knew better than anyone else the perversity and sin of his own people, but he refused to allow his relationship with those "stiff-necked people" to end. Because of his intercession, different translations of Scripture have it, "the LORD *repented, relented or changed his mind* about the disaster he had planned to bring on his people" (v. 14).

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### Reflecting and Recording

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1. How does the fact that Scripture says the Lord "repented," "relented," or "changed his mind" harmonize with your understanding of God's nature? Is this a new thought for you? Which one of the translations do you prefer: *repented, relented, or changed his mind*? Why?



2. Spend a few minutes reflecting on the nature and character of God in light of Moses' experience with God.



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### During the Day

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Continue living with the memory verse. Have you memorized it yet?



## DAY 7

# Sacrifice Essential in Intercession

*The next day Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”*

—EXODUS 32:30

LATER IN YESTERDAY’S STORY FROM EXODUS 32, GOD MAKES IT CLEAR WHO GOD is. Moses is in the high mountains, with splintered peaks around, in one of his regular one-on-one conversations with God, and asks God to “show him his glory.” The Lord instructs him to move into the cleft in the rock and says, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (Ex. 33:19). F. B. Meyer, British scholar/preacher, makes this observation:

There was nothing in the brooding cloud, or flashing light, or trembling earth to stimulate the sense of loving kindness and tender mercy (in God). Yet Moses seems to have come to the very discovery of God as John did, after being trained in the inner secret of Christ’s love, and they reached hands across the centuries—Moses the shepherd of Israel and John the disciple whom Jesus loved—saying “God is Love.”<sup>1</sup>

When God revealed his goodness and mercy to Moses, this intensified Moses’ praying; he stayed on the mountain, pleading for his people for forty days and nights. Persistence, what is called *importunity* in the New Testament, which we will discuss later, is an essential dimension of intercession.

Return to Moses’ intercession for Israel following the golden calf sin of idolatry, when they had put another god before God:

Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so became a laughingstock to their enemies . . . The next day Moses said to the people, “You

have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” So Moses went back to the LORD and said, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.” (Ex. 32:25, 30–32)

Genuine intercession is unselfish, even sacrificial. Moses had interceded with God earlier and had convinced God not to destroy the people. Now he was announcing to them that he would mediate for them again. And what a dramatic encounter it was! There is not much detail about what must have gone on between Moses and God, but there was no need for that. The jolting fact, found in verse 32, was that Moses was willing to give his own life for his people: “If you won’t forgive their sins, then blot me out.”

Genuine intercession  
is unselfish,  
even sacrificial.

This sacrificial intercessory commitment reminds us of Jesus and his praying. Though the prayers of Jesus verbally reported in the Gospels are not many, his unselfish intercession is convincing. When we discuss it later, we will label it *willing love*, which is an essential dimension for effective intercession. One thinks of what we call Jesus’ “high priestly prayer” in John 17, and his commitment, “for their sakes I sanctify Myself” (v. 19 NKJV). This unselfish intercession reached the ultimate height in Jesus’ willingness to go to the cross on our behalf, and even there, interceding for his enemies: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34 KJV).

Was what he would do with his Son in God’s mind as he listened to Moses’ pleading and witnessed the earnestness of his prayers in his willingness to die for his people? In essence, God’s response was that every man must stand for his own sin. Moses could not make an atonement, for he, too, was a sinner, and no sinful person can make an atonement for another. Yet, in mercy and in the love that would one day give Christ to the cross, forgiveness was granted. Moses affirmed his call to lead the people to the land of promise, with God’s assurance that God’s angel would go before them. Moses knew his prayer had been answered. We may not always “know” as clearly as Moses, but trusting God we will know that he is with us.

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## Reflecting and Recording

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1. The thesis of this book is that intercession is a form of prayer to which we are called, but prayer is only one expression of intercession. The ultimate call is to an intercessory life. Look back over your life and recall an experience in which you prayed, acted, or related sacrificially to another. Make enough notes in your journal of your memory of that experience to get it clearly in mind.



2. Would you think of that experience as intercession? What about it suggests the nature of intercessory prayer?



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## During the Day

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Jesus affirmed in prayer, “for their sakes I sanctify myself.” This was the height of unselfish commitment. Keep this word in mind as you share with people today and in the coming days. If you are a part of a group sharing this workbook journey, keep this word in mind as you participate in meeting with them today.

# Group Meeting for Week One

## Introduction

Group sessions are most effective when all participants talk about their experiences; this guide is designed to facilitate personal sharing. All participants need to be sensitive to what seems to be happening in each other's lives; it is far more important for people to be heard and feelings to be acknowledged than for information to be shared. If you did not opt for the introductory session, you may want to review and pull in some of the elements for this session.

And finally, as a group, be mindful that confidentiality is essential. Each of you owes yourself and each other a safe environment for transparency—not only does it help the person sharing; it helps the rest of the group know how to intercede on his/her behalf.

## Sharing Together

If you did not have an introductory session to get acquainted, begin by asking each person to introduce him- or herself by giving their full name and what they like to be called. Informality is important. If you did opt for the introductory session, be sure to introduce any new members who have arrived this week.

- As a group, spend four or five minutes responding to this question: What is your response to the author's (Maxie's) claim that God is good and communication with God is possible?
- Invite the group to thumb through the workbook and locate their most difficult or most meaningful day with the material. Then ask three or four volunteers to share either their most meaningful or most difficult day. You, the facilitator, will want to begin the sharing.
- Invite the group to turn to their Reflecting and Recording on Day 6 of their book. Spend as much time as you have left discussing the nature of God in light of Moses' experience of God "repenting" (relenting or changing his mind). Is this a new insight? What do you think about it?

## Praying Together

Each week's suggestions call for the group to pray together. Corporate prayer empowers Christians. This is a huge part of our forty-day journey.

As a reminder, group members need to feel comfortable during corporate prayer. No one should feel pressured to pray aloud. Silent corporate prayer may be as vital and meaningful as spoken prayer.

That said, verbalizing thoughts and feelings to God in the presence of fellow pilgrims can be a powerful bonding experience for a group sharing a common journey. Verbal prayers may be offered spontaneously as individuals choose to pray aloud. Avoid suggesting, "Let's go around the circle now, and each one pray." You may, however, consider having the same person open and close each prayer time. Another idea might be to ask individual group members (who are willing) to pray for the specific requests made by other group members, both in the shared prayer time and throughout the following week. This encourages petition and intercession at a personal level, draws groups closer together, and puts intercessory living into practice.

Here are some possibilities for this closing period:

- If you have not already done so, encourage everyone to write the names of group members in the front of their books and to pray for them every week.
- Invite the group to spend a few minutes in silent prayer. Three or four minutes is a long time for people who are together for the first time, so you may want to begin with that amount of time, and increase it in the future as the group grows together. In this silence, ask the group to think of each person in the group, and what each person may have shared, and pray silently for each person.
- Ask a volunteer to close by praying aloud the Brennan Manning prayer at the close of Day 1.