**Learn in Community**

 Small Group Study

**Volume Overview**

**How do I live for God?**

“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.” ([Matthew 6:33](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt6.33))

*Parents are constantly bombarded with information from their kids. One child might be describing something that happened to her at school, and another could be going on and on about a favorite video he just watched or created. Or they might just be demanding more snacks. Then, at times, those same kids simultaneously try to explain why they were fighting with each other and whose fault it was. In those moments, freshly armed with details, a parent can be left wondering,* “What do I do with all this information?”

*You may be feeling the same way. In society, we’re constantly bombarded with information and competing agendas. What should you do with all these facts and opinions? If you’re feeling that tension, this volume is for you! We’ll be looking at Scripture for answers as to how to assimilate this information as we ask the all-important question: How do I live for God?*

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| First time leading *Learn* for Adults? Check out the [Facilitator Guide](https://0b769b0ed3569ef9d18b-f88d8272f61086866d50d048b43ef630.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/sites/biblengagementproject/Listen_Facilitator_Guide.pdf). |

To access session content and videos from a computer, visit: [BibleEngagementProject.com/downloads](https://bibleengagementproject.com/downloads)

**Engage**

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| **QUESTION**What is your earliest memory of praying? How has your understanding of prayer changed since then? |

While God’s Word is clear that prayer changes things, our frequency of prayer may not match our belief in it. For example, according to the Pew Research Center, the majority of Americans pray every day (55 percent). The same study revealed that 75 percent of Americans pray at least once a month. Prayer is still prevalent in the United States and many other nations around the world, but what does prayer actually mean? What are we praying for? Who are we praying to? When and why are we praying?

More importantly, what did Jesus have to say about prayer? We’re going to learn that prayer isn’t for emergencies only. Prayer isn’t bringing a list of demands or desires to God. It’s more about us being changed than seeing change. For some Christians, prayer may seem like a burden—something they must do. But prayer is an amazing gift from God and meant to be a blessing, not a burden. God wants to bless us and strengthen us through the avenue of prayer. Talking regularly with God is a wonderful way to pursue Him, His kingdom, and all He has for you.

**Watch**

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: What’s your favorite way or place to connect with God through prayer?



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| **QUESTION**What’s your favorite way or place to connect with God through prayer? |

**Consider What the Bible Says**

Perhaps Jesus’ most famous teaching is the Sermon on the Mount ([Matthew 5–7](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt5-7)). In these chapters, He’s teaching His disciples and the crowd what His kingdom is all about. He shared wisdom and guidance on pursuing God through fasting and prayer. Much of the religious landscape of Jesus’ time was about outward behavior and strict rule following. But Jesus knew the way people lived matters, and why they lived the way they did matters even more.

**Pursuit of God Requires Right Motivations**

Read [Matthew 6:5–8](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt6.5-8), [16–18](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt6.16-18).

Jesus bookends His famous teaching on the Lord’s Prayer with examples of people praying and fasting for the wrong reasons. Praying to impress others makes prayer about us, not God. Fasting involves giving up something—often meals—and replacing that activity with focus on God through things like prayer. So, fasting to be seen by others goes against the very purpose of fasting—forgetting oneself and focusing more intensely on God.

If we pray believing the right words will move God, we’re placing our trust in ourself more than God. We don’t pray to inform, convince, or manipulate God. We pray out of obedience and deep gratitude that we have access to God because of Jesus.

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| **QUESTION**How would you summarize Jesus’ main point from these two passages? |

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| **QUESTION**If God knows what we need before we ask, should we change our approach to prayer? Why or why not? |

**Pursuit Requires a Humble Approach**

Read [Matthew 6:9–10](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt6.9-10).

Jesus starts the Lord’s Prayer with the phrase, “Our Father in heaven.” All prayer must begin with recognizing who we are and who we are approaching in prayer. The word *our* indicates we’re part of a family, not just on our own. *Father* means we’re coming to a God who is not distant or distracted. He loves us and wants to bless us. “In heaven” reminds us of His perspective and power.

Prayer is an act of humility. It acknowledges we can’t do life on our own. We’re fully dependent upon God. Jesus knew the importance of prayer. He often went off on His own to talk to God ([Luke 5:16](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk5.16)). If Jesus needed time in prayer, how much more do you and I need it!

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| **QUESTION**How can pride or thinking you can do things on your own be an obstacle to your prayer life? |

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| **QUESTION**How might prayer help you gain God’s perspective for your life? |

**Pursuit Requires Open Hands**

Read [Matthew 6:11–13](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt6.11-13).

The next part of this prayer positions us to need God for everything—our food for today, our forgiveness from sin, and our freedom from temptation. Our greatest need is for our heart to be forgiven and freed, and we can’t do that for ourself. So when we pray, we should come to God with open hands and an open heart. We should pray primarily to *be* changed, not to *see* change. Prayer isn’t just about bringing a list of needs and wants. Prayer is our opportunity to surrender and make ourself available for whatever work God wants to do in us and through us.

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| **QUESTION**How should our prayer life reflect our need to be changed and not just our desire to see change? |

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| **QUESTION**How can prayer help you overcome temptation in your life? |

**Pursuit Requires Forgiving Hearts**

Read [Matthew 6:14–15](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt6.14-15).

Jesus teaches something remarkable here: Our unforgiveness toward others is an obstacle to receiving His forgiveness for our own sins. If we can’t or won’t forgive people who have sinned against us, what does our action say about our relationship with God? Jesus taught that those who know they have been forgiven much, love much ([Luke 7:47](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk7.47)). If we refuse to forgive others, we reveal we don’t truly understand the depth of forgiveness necessary to restore us to God.

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| **QUESTION**What makes it so difficult to forgive others who have hurt us? |

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| **QUESTION**How can the gospel (the good news about Jesus) free us to be someone who forgives? |

**Reflect**

**I Pursue God**

Everyone spends their time and energy pursuing something or someone. It may be a promotion at work or the approval of a person or group of people. You probably know someone who seems to have built their entire life around the pursuit of power, control, or influence. Many pursue pleasure and comfort through expensive vacations, enjoyable entertainment, or harmful substances. Whatever or whoever you pursue most is your true deity.

Prayer is one very important way we can pursue God. In prayer, we approach God and pursue His will and His ways. We pursue His blessing and His strength for the day. We pursue becoming more and more like Jesus. And we pursue God knowing He first pursued us. When we end our prayers with the phrase, “In Jesus’ name, I pray,” we’re recognizing we can approach God confidently and consistently only because of what Jesus did for us!

**Listen to God**

Let’s pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

**Personal Reflection Questions**

*Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.*

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| **QUESTION**How does God’s pursuit of you motivate and inspire you to pursue Him? |

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| **QUESTION**Do you recognize in yourself any wrong motivations behind prayer or fasting? |

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| **QUESTION**What are the greatest obstacles to having a more consistent or vibrant prayer life? |

**Activate**

I haven’t met many Christians who don’t struggle with their prayer life. In today’s passage, Jesus spoke of our need for specific times of private prayer. Every believer needs to carve out time in their day to pray. If you don’t already do this daily, your next step isn’t to start praying two hours every day! Instead, your next step may be finding five to ten minutes each day to pray and become consistent doing so.

When you pray, start by thanking God for who He is and what He’s done. Then share your burdens and concerns with Him. Finally, take some time to be still and listen. Prayer is an important way we pursue God.

**Challenge**

Pick a time when you can stop and pray every day. Set a repeating daily alarm on your phone as a reminder. Use an app on your phone to begin a list of prayer needs. Share this with someone in your life and ask that person to help encourage you in the habit of daily prayer.

**Prayer Requests**

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| Note any requests from the group and remember to pray for them during the week. |

Before next time, continue to spend time in God’s Word with the personal devotions.

**Did You Know?**

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| *During the days of the New Testament, fasting became a popular contemplative measure surrounding sin. In one of the popular Jewish writings of Jesus’ day, a work known as the Wisdom of Solomon, fasting is described as a way to atone and reflect on unintentional sins in one’s life. This same sentiment carried over through other works such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the writings of Josephus. The Jewish historian, Josephus, emphasized fasting to prevent further unintentional sins as well. Though it is unknown how widely the notion was accepted as a form of atonement, we undoubtedly see growing popularity with fasting in the life of individuals in the first century compared to centuries prior.* |

**Learn on Your Own**

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| *Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.* |

**Day 1: I Pursue God**

Read [Matthew 6:5–18](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt6.5-18).

Look back over Learn in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven’t already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

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| **QUESTION**What is God saying to you about pursuing Him through prayer? |

**Learn on Your Own**

**Day 2: Put God First in Your Thoughts**

Read [Colossians 3:1–4](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Col3.1-4).

In this passage, Paul instructed the believers in Colossae where they should focus their mind and heart. Before he gave the command, he gave the reason: You have been raised to new life in Christ. This is something He has done for you! And the result is a newness only found in Jesus. In the light of that, we should set our mind on His kingdom more than the kingdoms of this world. This doesn’t mean we shouldn’t be engaged in the work He’s given us to do here and now. It means the strength to do what He’s called us to is found in the realities of heaven and the redemptive work of Jesus.

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| **QUESTION**What are some examples of “the things of earth” that might distract you from the kingdom of God? |

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| **QUESTION**What do you think Paul meant when he told us that Christ is our life and we will share in all His glory someday? |

**Learn on Your Own**

**Day 3: Put God First in Your Relationships**

Read [Luke 14:25–33](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk14.25-33).

During Jesus’ time, family had a very high cultural value. Every decision about life would have been made with great consideration for what it would mean for your family. Most men would apprentice under their father to learn their trade or skill. Newlyweds would often build a living space onto the existing family home.

This cultural focus on family made Jesus’ words here even more startling. Was Jesus literally saying that we need to hate our family? Of course not. At the cross, we see Jesus caring for His mother even in His dying moments. But Jesus was saying our love for Him and our devotion to Him should be so far above all other loves and devotion that by comparison it could be said we “hate” all other things, even good things like family. Jesus knows the best way for us to love our family is to put Him first.

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| **QUESTION**Why can our love and devotion to the good things of life like family pose such a threat to putting God first in our life? |

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| **QUESTION**How does loving Jesus above all else free us and empower us to better love our families? |

**Learn on Your Own**

**Day 4: Put God First in Your Finances**

Read [Proverbs 3:5–10](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Pr3.5-10).

This passage in Proverbs is all about trust. Whoever or whatever we trust most, we’ll put first in our life. This author gives a practical application, one we can all relate to. What does the way we approach and handle our finances reveal about who or what we trust in most? Giving to God is an act of thankfulness, obedience, and trust. It begins by recognizing that everything we have is from God, so it all belongs to Him anyway.

Because we trust in God above all else, we believe and obey His Word and His instructions, including His instructions to be generous. So, putting God first in your finances requires you to consider whether you’re spending your money on your kingdom or investing your money in His kingdom.

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| **QUESTION**Why does money have so much power over our life? |

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| **QUESTION**In what specific ways are you putting God first in your finances? |

**Learn on Your Own**

**Day 5: Put God First in Your Work**

Read [Colossians 3:22–25](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Col3.22-25).

In this passage, Paul used the working relationship between slaves and masters to make a point. What Paul was saying in this text is remarkable. Work isn’t to be endured or adored. It isn’t meaningless, and it can’t be our primary source of meaning. Instead, work should be worship. We’re created in the image of a working God, and He created us to do good work. When we do our work well and when our work blesses others, it’s a form of worship. We’re choosing to put God first.

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| **QUESTION**How does our society view work? |

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| **QUESTION**How can you glorify God in your work? |