

## **GROWING in Deeper RELATIONSHIP with GOD**

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### **What was early Christianity like?**

- *It is difficult for us to visual what early Christianity was like.*
- *Certainly it was very different from the Christianity as it is known today.*

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### **What was early Christianity like?**

- *There were no fine church building.*
- *There was no hierarchy.*
- *There were no theological seminaries.*
- *There were no Christian colleges.*
- *There were no Sunday Schools and choirs.*
- *Only small group of believers.*

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### **What was early Christianity like?**

- *In the beginning, there was not even a New Testament.*
- *The first books of the NT were letters written by Jesus' disciples to the little house groups because of their challenges, and persecutions.*

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### **Changes started in the church when the small groups of believers moved from the home to a building.**

- **The Lord's Supper:** *changed from symbolic to ritualistic.*
- **The Leadership Style:** *changed from gifted to professional.*

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### **Changes started in the church when the small groups of believers moved from the home to a building.**

- **Worship:** *changed from participation to spectatorship and entertainment.*
- **Witness:** *changed from relationship to salesmanship.*

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**Changes started in the church when the small groups of believers moved from the home to a building.**

- **Ministry:** changed from personal to social
- **Discipleship:** changed from apprenticeship to classroom education.



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**Changes started in the church when the small groups of believers moved from the home to a building.**

- **Fellowship:** changed from in-depth to superficial.
- **Use of Spiritual gifts:** changed from edifying to impressing.



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**Changes started in the church when the small groups of believers moved from the home to a building.**

- **Stewardship:** changed from a gift from the heart to dues.
- **Prayer:** changed from relational perseverance to instantaneous answers.



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**If we were to ask Christians around us what they struggle with most in their relationship with God, what would they say?**



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**Some Common Comments:**

- *"It is so difficult to pray in a small group."*
- *"Praying in our group is predictable to the point of boredom."*
- *"It is the long silences that I find them so embarrassing."*



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**Effective Group Prayer:**

- *Effective group prayer seldom "just happen".*
- *Groups which struggle most with meaningful group prayer are those that comprise individuals who are quite proficient in their personal prayer.*



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### 4 Key Principles in Effective Group Prayer:

- *Effective prayer in small groups can be learned.*
- *Best way to learn to pray in groups is to pray in groups!*

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### 4 Key Principles in Effective Group Prayer:

- *Effective group prayer needs to be planned.*
- *Planning encourages sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.*

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### Effective prayer in small groups is a skill that can be learned:

- *It is learning the skills of listening carefully to one another, building on each others' contribution and signaling that we are actively participating in what is being prayed by others.*

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### The best way to learn to pray in groups is to pray in groups!

- *It is more than learning a new attitude.*
- *It is more than learning a technique.*
- *Creative enthusiasm and perseverance can go hand in hand.*

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### Effective Group Prayer needs to be Planned:

- *It is far too easy for prayer to be squeezed out of small group life.*
- *Energy and time should be invested to ensure that group prayer happens well.*

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### Planning Encourages Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit:

- *Planning an effective group prayer life does not compete with or override the work of the Holy Spirit.*
- *It provides a setting which enhances greater sensitivity to His work in the group.*

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### Why is Prayer Important?

- *The Christian life is all about relationship.*
- *When Jesus was asked which commandment was the most important, he answered with “don’t do this” or “don’t do that”.*

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### The Greatest Commandment

- *In Mark 12:29-31, Jesus said: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”*

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### What is Prayer?

- *Prayer is talking to God?*
- *Prayer is asking God what we need?*
- *Prayer is telling God how much we love Him?*
- *Prayer is praising God?*
- *Prayer is all of the above?*

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### Our Prayers tend to Reflect an Activist Perspective.

- *Our prayers seem to be limited to something we do or perform.*
- *Our prayers tend to show a fairly one-way flow of communication from us to God.*

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*“We are so used to talking to God that many of us really practicing ventriloquists – we have all this one-way communication and He seems to be awfully silent in the process. The more we talk, the less we seem to have any conviction that He’s heard us – and the less satisfaction we gain from our times of prayer.”*

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### What is Prayer?

- *Prayer as friendship with God.*
- *Prayer as partnership with God.*

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### Prayer as Friendship with God

• *Prayer as friendship with God is "... nothing else than being on terms of friendship with God."*



~ Teresa of Avila



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### Prayer as Friendship with God

• *Real friendship is based on "affective knowledge" i.e. knowledge that leads to loving and responding to being loved.*



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### What is Prayer?

- *Prayer is the raising of our hearts and minds to God.*
- *It is allowing the Holy Spirit to commune with our spirit.*
- *It is simply being in God's presence.*



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### Prayer is our Commitment to 2 Relationships:

- *Prayer as friendship with God.*
- *Prayer as partnership with God.*



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### Prayer as Partnership with God

- *Prayer is about how we respond to God, getting to know Him, appreciating Him and discovering His perspective for our lives.*
- *What does our prayer express?*



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### Prayer as Partnership with God

- *An expression of our faith.*
- *An expression of love.*
- *An expression of discipleship.*

### How does this work?



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### Prayer as Partnership with God

*When we spend time with God:*

- *We are able to seek and discover His will, rather than imposing our demands on Him.*
- *We are changed and become the answer to our prayers.*



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*“To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives.”*



*~Richard Foster*



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### When Prayer and Small Groups are Integrated:

• *They are the expressions of community between God and people and between people themselves.*



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### When Prayer and Small Groups are Integrated:

• *They are places where Christians may sense that they are “at home”, where hospitality may be experienced; one’s identity affirmed and strengthened; loving correction given and received graciously.*



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### When Prayer and Small Groups are Integrated:

- *They provide a setting to allow the Holy Spirit to work at transforming us to reflect His life.*
- *They provide spiritual growth in Christian discipleship.*



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*“Spiritual growth is a process of becoming more integrated, more whole. It is a process of bringing into harmony with one another, my mind (intellectual belief), my heart (emotions), my will (choices), and my actions (expressed through my physical body)...”*



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*"The goal of such integration of mind, emotions, will and action is a greater freedom to love and serve God in His world and in others."*

– Sheila Pritchard



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**When Prayer and Small Groups are Integrated:**

• *The Holy Spirit transforms us as His disciples through prayer and small groups in at least 7 areas.*

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**Transformed in at least 7 Areas:**

• *The understanding of our faith as Christians and how this affects every aspect of our life.*

• *The range and quality of the feelings we have towards God, ourselves, other people and God's creation.*

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**Transformed in at least 7 Areas:**

• *The practical demonstrations of God's Spirit at work more and more consistently in us (fruit of the Spirit).*

• *The acceptance of ourselves fully because we know we are being accepted by God.*

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**Transformed in at least 7 Areas:**

• *To model the example of Jesus in our desire and ability to enter into caring relationships, to empathize and to enable us to "love our neighbours as we love our selves".*

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**Transformed in at least 7 Areas:**

• *Recognizing and using the spiritual gifts which God has given us to enable the Church to fulfill her mission.*

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**Transformed in at least 7 Areas:**

• *Accepting the responsibilities of God's "kingdom-community" by becoming involved in service (ministry) both within the Church and in the wider community.*

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**When Prayer and Small Groups are Integrated:**

• *They become our platform to develop our listening skills towards God and others.*

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**When Prayer and Small Groups are Integrated:**

• *Our prayers become mission-minded as we sense and respond to God's heartbeat for His world.*

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**When Prayer and Small Groups are Integrated:**

• *There is great potential for in-depth spiritual growth and service.*

***Is this the experience of prayer in our small groups?***

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