



Learning to Pray Video Series—Suggestions for Hosting Group Conversation

Even people who have been attending Christian worship for decades can feel uncomfortable praying or talking about prayer. Too often, they have never been offered guidance on how to pray, or even *why* to pray. These videos are designed to give enough theological and how-to guidance for people to be able to "try on" a way of praying for a week. And having a group to gather with regularly, to support their efforts, encourage them when they feel uncertain, and create a safe space to ask questions and share experiences will deepen their formation much more than simply watching the videos.

The videos here can be used on their own for teaching on a specific type of prayer, or several or all of them can be used as the core content for as a small group course exploring different forms of prayer. We encourage you to use them as is best in your context, and to adapt the conversation guide here in ways that help your particular group learn most effectively.

Suggested format: Provide one video per week to your congregation or group to watch at home and encourage participants to practice the form of prayer introduced in the video each day throughout the week. Then gather together to discuss their experiences, what they learned, and how they may have been drawn nearer to God through this practice of prayer.

Getting started:

1. Select a host or co-hosts for the course. Having two co-hosts of different ages, genders, orders, and/or spiritual backgrounds can help a wider range of people feel at home in the group. It also allows the group to meet if one or the other person needs to be absent unexpectedly.
2. Decide when and for how long the group will meet each week. 45 minutes to an hour might work well for most groups.
3. Send out an invitation to participate well in advance, so people have plenty of time to discern whether to participate.
4. At the first meeting, set up the space so that all can be seen and heard. You might consider a prayer and candle-lighting to set a sacred tone, or inviting people to sit in silence together for a minute to transition from the busyness of their lives to a posture of listening and openness together. If you are on Zoom, you might invite people to light a candle in their own space.
5. After whatever other welcoming activities you choose to do (which will depend on the size of the group and how well people know one another), take a few minutes to establish a few shared commitments. These can be determined by the members of your group, but might include:
 - a. making time for everyone to share
 - b. listening well to one another, not interrupting
 - c. it's ok to disagree but not to shame or judge
 - d. it's ok to be a beginner; all questions welcome
 - e. it's ok not to speak and just to listen
 - f. confidentiality
6. In the first meeting, use the "Introduction" video and then invite conversation in response to it.

- a. What did you hear that was new to you?
 - b. Did the understanding of prayer shared in the video differ from what you learned as a child or what you were taught growing up (or more recently)?
 - c. What was the good news in this introduction?
7. End your time together by explaining the "homework" for the week ahead.
- a. Ask each person to watch a specific video the following day. All watching the same video.
 - b. During the next week, they are to "try on" this specific practice of prayer, ideally every day.
 - c. Give people a sense of what to expect: It may feel awkward at first. It's like learning a new skill and it takes time. Encourage people to make a few notes about their experience if they would like.
 - d. Preview the fact that when the group next meets, they will have a chance to reflect on their experience of the specific practice of prayer together.
 - e. Conclude with the Lord's Prayer or a verse of a well-known hymn, the collect for the day, compline, or with the prayer practice for the week if time permits. You can also provide the option for people to watch the next video together before leaving if they have time.

In continuing weeks:

1. If two people are co-hosting this course, it will be helpful for them to meet between gatherings to check in on how things are going: What worked well at the last meeting? What are they learning about how to support these specific people? Who is going to lead what at the next meeting? Then the co-hosts might pray together for those in their group. If one person is hosting, taking time each week to reflect on these things and pray for the group members will be helpful.
2. Each time the group gathers:
 - a. Begin with prayer and/or candle-lighting and/or silence, as you discern best. If possible, consider inviting others into leading the group in prayer as you continue.
 - b. Briefly review your group's shared commitments.
 - c. Invite reflection on people's experience of the prayer practice itself, asking questions that invite sharing, such as:
 - i. what was it like to try on this practice?
 - ii. what did you notice in your body, your thoughts, your spirit, as you continued through the week?
 - iii. did you find yourself resistant to this practice or to the ways it was challenging you?
 - d. Then invite conversation on the theological or historical aspects of the practice, such as:
 - i. reminding people of a quotation or a fact shared in the video and inviting reaction to it.
 - ii. expanding on the teaching in the video, drawing on your own resources or those other participants offer.
 - iii. if the group is enthusiastic about a particular practice, they might like to invite someone to join them who has been practicing this kind of prayer for a long time or studying it academically, to lead a "special session" to help them deepen their practice.
 - e. Conclude with the Lord's Prayer or a verse of a well-known hymn, the collect for the day, compline, or with the prayer practice for the week if time permits.