

# Meeting God in Prayer

## Leader's Guide

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### F E A T U R I N G

Frederick Gaiser came to Luther Seminary as a lecturer in Old Testament in 1973 and was promoted to professor in 1991. He has served as acting dean of students (1986-88) and as registrar (1975-77).

Steven Paulson joined the Luther Seminary faculty as associate professor of systematic theology in the fall of 1998 after serving as assistant professor of religion at Concordia College, Moorhead, Minn., since 1993.

Diane Jacobson came to the Luther Seminary faculty as an assistant professor in 1982, and was promoted to associate professor in 1990. In 1999, she became professor of Old Testament. She was chair of the biblical division from 1993 to 1996.

Alan Padgett joined the Luther Seminary faculty in July 2001. Previously, he served as professor of theology and the philosophy of science at Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, Calif., since 1992.

Mary Hess joined the Luther Seminary faculty in July of 2000. She received her master of theological studies degree in 1992 from Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass. In 1998, she received her Ph.D. in religion and education from Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Mass.

Sarah Henrich came to the Luther Seminary faculty in 1992 from Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, where she had been assistant professor of New Testament (half-time) since 1989.

David J. Lose joined the Luther Seminary faculty in July of 2000. Previously, he had served as a pastor at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Princeton Junction, N.J., and as a teaching fellow and visiting lecturer at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, N.J.

Richard Wallace joined the Luther Seminary faculty in 1999 after serving as Director at the Lutheran Theological Center in Atlanta (LTCA), where he had been since 1997.

Matt Skinner joined the Luther Seminary faculty in 2002. He earned his graduate degrees from Princeton Theological Seminary, where he also served as a teaching fellow and visiting lecturer prior to accepting a call to Luther Seminary.

Lois Malcolm joined the Luther Seminary faculty in 1994 as assistant professor of systematic theology and became an associate professor in the fall of 1999.

Daniel Simundson became a member of the Luther Seminary faculty in 1972 and was named professor of Old Testament in 1981. He was dean of students in 1974-75, and dean of academic affairs in 1976-78. He returned to that position in 1988-93 and again in 1995-96. He retired in 2003.

Alvin Luedke joined the Luther Seminary faculty in July 2001. Previously, he served as a research associate with the Strategic Policies Research Group and as an interim pastor in Texas since 1998.

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## FOR THE LEADER

Thank you for agreeing to facilitate this video series on *Meeting God In Prayer*. Whether you are sharing leadership in this study, or it is the responsibility of one person, you are participating in something important and meaningful. Thankfully, the discussion belongs to the whole group, and does not rest solely upon your shoulders. Your job is simply to initiate conversation, inviting others fully into the discussion. Keep in mind that people participate in groups in different ways. Some may be more quiet, while others like to speak up. Help facilitate as you see best, welcoming each person to the group, and their contributions. You may need to keep in mind time considerations, helping to keep the group focused and on-track.

You will be in charge of making sure there are all the appropriate materials that the group will need for that session, including photocopies of the study guide sheets and some Bibles. Occasionally, a chalkboard, whiteboard or large easel might be helpful in recording the group's responses, but a piece of paper and a person to record will do.

Before each session, make sure you watch the video, and read the questions to be discussed. Also, read through any biblical material that is mentioned. You might want to give some attention to the place where you will be meeting, setting up the VCR or DVD and TV ahead of time, along with arranging the tables and chairs.

Begin and end each session with prayer. This helps center and focus the group. After watching the video (see **How to Use This Series** for video information), there may be questions or issues that your group wants to discuss that evolve naturally. Go with these if they seem appropriate! Otherwise, follow-up questions are provided to help facilitate discussion.

## HOW TO USE THIS SERIES

These six sessions are in no particular order. You may watch them in any order. They are all about 5 minutes in length and this guide provides summaries and suggestions to give the leader material to think about and questions to help create discussion. Each session is focused around the question posed in the title. It might be helpful to ask the question of the group before you begin watching each session to prepare the viewer. Because of the relatively brief nature of each session, this resource is appropriate for a variety of settings such as bible studies, teacher training, committee devotions, staff devotions, Sunday morning adult education, confirmation and youth group studies, etc. You may choose to play them all on one day or one per meeting.

This series is also available in an audio CD version for use in the home and car. This is a nice resource to make available to folks for check out from the church office or library.

## What you need

- TV
- VCR or DVD player
- Bibles
- Paper and pencil/pen for jotting notes

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## Session One: Devotional

This session mixes music and song of prayer with short important statements about prayer to create a devotional. Use this at the beginning of your sessions, or at the end. If you are doing one session per meeting, you may want to use the devotional to end every time as a conclusion. This session is a great stand-alone resource for devotions before prayer meetings, for study on prayer for all ages, for devotions before meetings, staff and teacher training.

Throughout this series, the notion of a dependent relationship with God is highlighted and is especially evident in this devotional. With this devotional tool, invite the viewers to enter into it with a mind open to hear how God meets them in prayer. Invite them to let the images and the music carry them. Have them listen for things that may be new and listen for things that are familiar. This session is experiential, so try to find ways to balance the learning of information of the other sessions with the reflection of this session.

Ask the group to think together about the subject of communication with God in prayer. Prayer is a very natural and easy thing for many believers, but many Christians find they do not pray regularly, except as part of a church service or maybe before an evening meal. When they do think about prayer at all, it may only be to wonder if there is something missing in their prayer life. These reflections on prayer will provide an opportunity to pause and reflect with others on the meaning of prayer and to discuss some of the questions that often arise when one thinks more deeply about the subject of prayer, such as how to pray, when to pray, and whether it is true that God always answers prayer.

### Conversation Starters:

1. Since this may be the first time, the group needs to spend a little time to make sure that they all know each other. The conversation can become quite personal as people reveal their inner thoughts and feelings when they talk about their prayer life. It is important that the level of trust is high.
2. Ask if anyone is willing to share some personal experiences with prayer. What kind of routine or practice works for them? What has been good? Do they sometimes feel that something is lacking? If so, what might that be?
3. Was there anything in the quotes that you heard that particularly caught your attention? Is there anything that raised questions that you would like to talk about further?
4. What did you think of the song? The word “need” occurs over and over. Do we “need” to pray? Why? If we do not often pray, but we do not feel a particular “need,” what does that mean?

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## Session Two: What Is Prayer?

How do we define prayer? We hear many different ways to answer this question but there is a certain consistency. Several words are used by many of the professors: relationship, conversation, honesty, trust/faith, sharing of mind and heart. So prayer is like an honest conversation between a human being and God. It is not meant to be a process that can be manipulated in order to force God to give us exactly what we ask for. It is much deeper and more complicated than that. Though we may hear and benefit from suggestions from others about how they organize their prayer life, there are, in a real sense, no “how to do it” manuals that will apply to everyone. Prayer is too personal for that. Sometimes, when the circumstances warrant it, a prayer can be complaining, arguing with God, holding God accountable to God’s own promises.

### Conversation Starters:

1. If asked to define prayer, the first reaction of many might be to say that it is a way to take your requests to God and then wait for God to answer them. Is this a valid definition of prayer? Is it perhaps valid but insufficient to cover all that happens in prayer? Explain.
2. How would you define prayer for yourself? Would you concur with the quotes you heard? Where might you differ from them?
3. One of the professors remarked that there are two kinds of prayers—“Thank you, thank you, thank you” and “Help me, help me, help me.” What do you think of that statement?
4. The point was made several times that prayer should be honest. We should talk to God about what we really think and feel and not what we think God wants to hear. Many believers fear that they will say the wrong thing and offend God. So they do not dare to admit doubts, fears, anger. What do you think?

## Session Three: How Do We Pray?

Several questions come when thinking about “how we pray.” Is there a form or structure one should follow, such as a sequence of confession, then praise, then requests, ending with more praise or thanksgiving? Are there certain techniques that work to put us in a proper receptive frame of mind, such as posture, kneeling, closing of eyes, deep breathing, and so on? Do we pray alone or with others or both? Must we pray our own words or can we borrow the words of others if we seem to have difficulty forming sentences on our own? Should prayer be spontaneous or well-planned? What if I do not say it right? Will that lessen my chance to get a good answer?

Maybe we worry too much about such matters of form, process, and content. We get bogged down in anxiety about getting it right rather than just saying it. The speakers tell us that if the relationship is right, there is no such thing as a “bad” prayer. When all you want is to love God and be with God, your prayer cannot be wrong.

### Conversation Starters:

1. When you pray, do you follow a set order, either consciously or unconsciously? Do you have something like a check list that you want to be sure to cover each time? Do you follow any techniques to set the mood and

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prepare yourself for a conversation with God? Share any insights with others in your study group.

2. Why do you think some of us have such a hard time when asked to pray aloud in public? Can we do this freely in our own words without great anxiety? Why or why not?
3. What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus? This was an important point for at least one of the speakers. Why?
4. Can you imagine what might be called a “bad” prayer? Or is such a thing not possible? Explain.

## Session Four: Why Do We Pray?

Why should we pray? If many Christians seem indifferent to any specific routines of prayer, what arguments can be made to emphasize the importance of prayer in their relationship with God? Several reasons are given by the speakers: the example of persons of faith throughout Scripture; God’s promise to hear and answer; claiming our identity as believers who are created to enjoy life and praise and glorify God; a reminder that God is the source of all our blessings; a place to confess or lament. Most of all, God wants it and expects it.

### Conversation Starters:

1. What motivates you to pray? Do any of the suggestions from the professors fit your own situation?
2. When you think of the great heroes and heroines of the faith in Scripture, what names come to you as good examples of people of prayer? What might we learn by looking at their prayers as recorded in the Bible?
3. The point was made that God wants us to pray and desires to engage us in conversation. Do you agree? If this is true, what implications does this have for the way God relates to human beings?
4. One of the professors said that prayer is not a method to get your way, to ask for something so that you can receive it from God. Yet, it seems people are most likely to pray when they desperately want something from God. Can both these statements be true? Talk a little about this.

## Session Five: Does God Answer Prayers?

Many Christians have struggled with this question over the years. Especially in times of great distress over illness or loss, people have wondered why, if God has promised to respond favorably to our prayers, we do not receive what we ask for. Many have had a crisis of faith because they prayed long and hard and nothing changed. The speakers remind us that the answer may be something other than “Yes.” It could also be “No” or “Wait.” Or others words could be added to the list, like maybe, perhaps, or “I’ll think about it,” or “Just trust me.” It is clear that we do not always receive all our specific petitions, but that does not mean that God has not heard and that God has failed to respond. Job was mentioned as an example of a biblical character who, along with his friends, asked a particular question of God, but God ignored their question and responded with a different kind of answer. Paul asked three times to have a “thorn in the flesh” removed and three times God said “No,” but Paul learned something about God’s power

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in weakness. As we go through life, we may not always receive answers to our fervent pleas for help or for a word of explanation, but what we may expect is to gain comfort, hope, strength, and assurance of God's presence.

## Conversation Starters:

1. This would be a good time to share some personal stories of asking and receiving. How did you deal with answers of yes, no, or wait?
2. What did you think of Lois Malcolm's talk about her mother? Did it make sense to you? Were you moved by it? What can we expect from God even when healing is not possible?
3. Do you ever wonder why God heals some and not others? Should we continue to pray for healing even if the medical world tells us that it is impossible? How do we handle the disappointment if the answer is "no?"
4. There is a saying, "Be careful what you ask for; you might get it." Can you think of examples where this turned out to be true? How does it fit into the bigger question of whether God answers prayer?

## Session Six: When Do We Pray?

God is always present so we can carry on a conversation any time—while walking, driving, thinking, playing—no matter when or where. But the speakers think that we need time when we pay attention to prayer, in order to focus on God's presence and not just take it for granted. When in trouble, human beings have an immediate impulse to pray. Those prayers would be more meaningful and powerful if prayer was already part of one's life. Prayer may be highly structured with set times and places, or more spontaneous. We can pray alone, with a partner, in a small group, or part of a worshiping community. Finally, it is important to remember that prayer is a conversation. We ought not to do all the talking. Take time to listen.

## Conversation Starters:

1. Share something of your own prayer routines. Are your prayers generally more spontaneous as you pray during your everyday activities? Or do you have set times, places, and resources that you use?
2. Does anyone have a prayer partner or participate in a small group that prays together? If so, share some of that experience. Is it something to recommend to others?
3. What can we learn about this question of when to pray by looking at the life of Jesus? When did he take time to pray?
4. How do you listen for God when you pray? Is there some way to create an opening for God? Does silence play an important part? What about the use of Scripture or other devotional material?