

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

**Practicing Wesleyan-Holiness
Spiritual Formation**



SESSION 12

Prayer: Confession, Intercession, and Petition

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Prayer: Confession, Intercession, and Petition

SESSION OVERVIEW

Prayer of Confession

Prayer of Intercession

Prayer of Petition

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- define and explain prayers of confession, intercession, and petition and state their significance for the holy life
- own the need to offer prayers of confession, intercession, and petition
- examine your prayer life and build the habit of offering prayers of confession, intercession, and petition

Prayer: Confession, Intercession, and Petition

INTRODUCTION



A life of prayer takes us inward to the transformation we need. Prayer does change us. If we are not prepared to change and be changed, we will make prayer a meaningless form of godliness or something we just do not have time for.

A life of prayer moves us upward into the intimacy and friendship with God that we long for. As we linger daily with God in adoration, rest in Him, and listen to Him, we move from thinking and feeling that God is a part of our lives to the realization, we are a small part of His life.

A life of prayer moves us outward into the ministry and service we need. Interceding takes our minds off ourselves as we make of our hearts an arena in which God and the prayed-for one can meet.

A life of prayer develops the practice of faith we need as we learn that God is to be trusted. After Calvary, God has a right to be trusted. That includes all the requests and petitions you and I bring so anxiously to Him.

Having studied the prayers of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving in the last module, we now turn to the prayers of confession, intercession, and petition. We will start with the Lord's Prayer and move to our own experiences in prayer.

WHY KEEP A SPIRITUAL LIFE JOURNAL



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“Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us” (Luke 11:4). All of us need to practice the prayer of confession. After our prayer of praise and thanksgiving our prayerful attention should move to confession. We will look at three types of confession.

CONFESSION OF SIN

Unconfessed sin strangles the spiritual life. When we find sin on our hands, the only appropriate thing to do is honestly confess it to God. Indeed, we know that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, KJV).

The worst thing to do would be to ignore or deny our sin or to call it something less than what it really is. If we find sin on our hands and “say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8, KJV). Honesty in confession is such a truth that when Mark Twain put these words into the mouth of Huck Finn readers then and now knew exactly what he meant: “You can’t pray a lie—I found that out.”

The New Testament word for confess is made from two Greek words. One means same or alike or in agreement. The other means word or speak. Therefore, confession means to speak alike or speak the same. The idea is that to confess our sins we say the same thing God does. We speak out our agreement with God about our sins. As we open the depths of ourselves to the Spirit who searches hearts, He may point out sins that cry out for redemption and forgiveness.

Confession is that important first step to full reconciliation with God. It is true that saved and sanctified men and women do not have to sin, but sometimes they do. When they do, honest confession must occur or the spiritual life starts running out of oxygen. All Christians have issues of maturation and growth that will bring conviction regarding wrong attitudes, abusive systems, and cultural assumptions. Lives are changed with the simple words, “I was wrong, will you forgive me?” God will stir these realizations in our lives and it is imperative that we both confess these places of sin to God and to others. So many destructive church dissensions would have been resolved with words of confession.

Nothing takes the place of confession: not busy hours of service to the needy, not long prayers for world peace, not signing up for a dozen church committees, not giving a month’s salary to missions. What is required is “Lord Jesus Christ, Son


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of God, Savior, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Note that God the Spirit goes with us as we examine our hearts. This is important, points out Richard Foster, for two reasons. First, “if we are the lone examiners of our heart, a thousand justifications will arise to declare our innocence.” At the other end of the spectrum is “our tendency for self-flagellation. If left to our own devices, it is so easy to take one good look at who we truly are and declare ourselves unredeemable. Our damaged self-image votes against us and we begin beating ourselves mercilessly.” *From Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home, 27.*

CONFESSION OF THE NEED FOR SANCTIFYING GRACE

Centuries of Christian experience tell us that even though a believer has been born again and has forsaken the life of sin, an inner bent toward sin still remains. Though the believer is done with deliberate acts of sin, an inward principle of sin still resists God’s will.

The Wesleyan tradition teaches that God can cleanse the heart and fill it with divine love until sanctification is a reality. The believer does come to love God with all the heart, mind, soul, and strength, and the neighbor as oneself. This is the gift of sanctifying grace. The renowned spiritual writer and teacher Albert E. Day wrote:

“On this I will venture my eternal salvation—if you will make the purity of God your indefatigable quest, the God of purity will give himself to you in such fullness, that your questions will be transcended in the splendor of the experience that has overtaken you.”

Before the splendor of that experience overtakes the Christian pilgrim, sin remains within—though it does not rule. Still the believer on the road to full sanctification can appropriately confess his or her need for inner cleansing, for the baptism with the Holy Spirit. *From Discipline and Discovery, (Nashville: Disciplined Order of Christ, 1961), 89.*

CONFESSION IN THE PRAYERS OF THE SANCTIFIED

John Wesley taught the most holy among us, “the most perfect . . . need the blood of the atonement, and may properly say, ‘Forgive us our trespasses.’” *From The Upward Call, 87.*

The point is “the most holy among us” are members of a fallen race and the fountain of a thousand infirmities. We can’t change that, but it shoves us toward falling short of God’s holiness, God’s perfect will again and again. “Our judgment


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is flawed, our reason inadequate, our knowledge deficient, and our performance of duty sometimes erratic—even though our intention is to do only the right.” *From The Upward Call, 87, “Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse III,” Sermons on Several Occasions, 32.*

An often-neglected teaching of Wesleyanism is these shortcomings, infirmities, faults, and failures that dog us because of our fallenness, while not properly called sins, still need the atoning blood of Christ to make us acceptable to God. Therefore, the most holy among us must confess the need for grace to cover our mistakes and failures. Closely related to this matter is that we must regularly confess our need for the ongoing cleansing by the Holy Spirit.

Holiness is dynamic, not static. When we receive the baptism of the Spirit, that is, the experience of sanctifying grace, God does not give us a lifetime supply of holiness we can store away like a bag of flour. The cleansing and filling of the Spirit is not once and for all. Rather, we are kept holy by the moment-by-moment, ongoing cleansing of the blood of the Savior.

John Wesley preached, “We need the power of Christ every moment . . . to continue in the spiritual life and without which, notwithstanding our present holiness, we should be devils the next moment.” Thus, confession is important for the deeper life Christian too. He or she should confess the need for atoning grace for the faults and failures endemic to our fallen human state as well as the need for ongoing, moment-by-moment cleansing by the Holy Spirit. *From “The Repentance of Believers,” Sermons on Several Occasions, (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book Room, n.d.), 185.*

THE “IN OTHER WORDS” EXERCISE

St. Augustine wrote, “Before God can deliver us we must undeceive ourselves.” In that spirit, consider the following list of hazards to confession. The fact is we need grace even to pray the prayer of confession properly. Some of our motives are muddled or invisible to us even as we pray. By God’s grace we ask Him to guide our confession away from the hazards and side streets that distract us. Think about each item on this list.

- You may ask for forgiveness without offering forgiveness.
- You may bewail the sins of humanity, but not your own.
- You can call your sin by a lesser name, like mistake or human frailty, tough love, or handing out justice.

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- You can come up with a thousand justifications for your sins.
- You can look at your sorry record and declare that you are unredeemable.
- You can deny you have sinned.
- You can daily, morbidly focus on yourself rather than God or others who need prayer.
- You can confess your sin and depravity with no hatred for it and with no intention or will to forsake it.
- You can keep on confessing humiliating sins for which God has long ago forgiven you, praying as if you questioned His forgiveness.
- You can confess a sin, but fail to make the restitution that God requires.

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION



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“Father . . . your kingdom come” (Luke 11:2) and “Always keep on praying for all the saints” (Eph. 6:18).

EMBRACE THE WORD

Read John 16:5-7. Phrases to note: “I am going to him who sent me . . . It is for your good that I am going away.” Jesus is returning to the Father in heaven and that is good for His disciples. Verse 7 gives one reason it is good for them that Jesus is going away. That is so the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, can come. But there is another reason that it is good. What do you think it is? (See 1 Tim. 2:5.)

Read Romans 8:34. “Christ Jesus, who died . . . is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” By going away, Jesus is “entering his eternal work as Intercessor before the throne of God, and, as a result, we are able to pray for others with an entirely new authority.” Donald Bloesch affirms, “To pray in the name of Christ means to pray in the awareness, that our prayers have no worthiness or efficacy apart from His *atonement* sacrifice and redemptive mediation . . . Our prayers cannot penetrate the tribunal of God unless they are presented to the Father by the Son.” *From The Struggle of Prayer, quoted by Foster, 193*

FOUR TEACHINGS ON INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Intercession is a priestly ministry. Intercession is a part of the priesthood of all believers because believers should be priests in prayer in behalf of one another. It is our calling to intercede on behalf of each other. The priestly function is one of bridge-building, mediating, connecting people with God. When we pray for one another, not only are we interceding but we are also listening on their behalf. It is a powerful gift when we return to our brother or sister in Christ and offer with humility our prayerful sense of what God might want to say regarding their situation.

Intercession creates a meeting place. “My heart can become the place where God can hear the prayer for my neighbors and embrace them with his love” (Henri Noewen). That is, the center of my heart can become the place where God and the person I am praying for can meet. There in my heart, God can “embrace them with his love.” Prayer is a place where the needs of a loved one are brought into the presence of God. When this loved one is not seeking God this becomes a unique meeting place where the unspoken prayers of their lives are spoken. As we lift this loved one to God with the simple prayer of “Come, Lord Jesus, come,” by faith we believe God hears and answers in seen and unseen ways.


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Have you ever thought of your heart in this way? Try it now. Prepare a place in your heart where God and someone in need can meet.

Intercession allows us to carry the suffering and sorrow of others. Richard Foster says in the intercessory prayer of suffering we “voluntarily take unto ourselves the grief and sorrow of others in order to set them free.” We cannot carry forever all the sorrows of others. Rather, when the time comes “we release them into the arms of the Father. . . . Our task . . . is a small one: to hold the agony of others just long enough for them to let go of it themselves.” From *The Cost of Discipleship*, 166, quoted in *The Reflecting God Workbook*, 79.

Take time now to imagine holding in your own heart the agony of a particular person who is suffering from a terminal disease, a broken marriage, a crushing depression, a chaining addiction, a total loss of self-esteem.

Intercession can prepare the way for repentance. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a World War II martyr, taught his people to intercede by repenting for unsaved persons. “We are taking their . . . guilt and perdition upon ourselves and pleading to God for them. We are doing vicariously what they cannot [or will not] do for themselves.” Repenting for another, Richard Foster believes, makes it somehow easier and more likely that person will turn to Christ.

Think about the power of intercession to create a place for God and others to meet, the ministry of holding the agony of another in one’s heart, and the power of repenting prayer to help others find the Lord.

FOUR WAYS TO PRACTICE INTERCESSORY PRAYER

All of us need help engaging in faithful intercessory prayers. We can be a forgetful people. How often has someone asked you for prayer and with all honesty you commit yourself to do so only to remember after the event of concern has passed. We can use reminders as prayer lists in Bibles, post it notes on our mirrors, reminders on our computers. The practice of putting something out of place can also work as a reminder. Take a picture in your office and put it upside down. It will be sure to remind you of someone’s world that is also upside down who needs your prayers.

E. Dee Freeborn, in *The Upward Call*, shares a method of intercession for family members. He says the birthdays in his family come on the 2nd, 21st, and 30th days of the month. So, he prays especially for his wife and two children every month on those days. As far as prayer support goes, it gives them 12 birthdays a year. “To remember, I switch a ring or watch to another hand or arm. Every time I notice the ‘out of place’ ring or watch during the day I breathe a prayer for that family member.”


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Another struggle when praying for others is we can run out of words to express our prayers. Praying scripture passages can be a helpful aid in giving a broader language with which to pray. It is important we take our time with these types of prayers and allow the words and their meanings to sink in. The example below is from Psalm 23 but there are many other prayers in scriptures that can be helpful. Sometimes using the prayers of scriptures can make us bolder in what we request.

PRAYING PSALM 23 FOR OTHERS

Insert the name of someone you are praying for into the blanks where personal pronouns appear in the text (Psalm 23, TEV)

The Lord is _____'s shepherd; _____ has everything he or she needs. He leads _____ in fields of green grass and leads _____ to quiet pools of fresh water. He gives _____ new strength. He guides _____ in the right paths, as he has promised. Even if _____ goes through deepest darkness, _____ will not be afraid, Lord, because you are with _____. Your shepherd's rod and staff protect _____. You prepare a banquet for _____ where all _____'s enemies can see _____; You welcome _____ as an honored guest and fill _____'s cup to the brim. I know your goodness and love will be with _____ all _____'s life; and your house will be _____'s home as long as _____ lives. Amen.

PRAYING THE LORD'S PRAYER FOR OTHERS

A prayer based in scripture and used across the ages is the Lord's Prayer. This is a powerful prayer to pray for others. Insert the name of the person for which you are praying into the blanks.

_____ 's Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name in _____. Thy kingdom come in _____. Thy will be done in _____ on earth just as if she/he were with you in heaven. Give _____ this day her/his daily bread, and forgive _____ her/his trespasses as she/he forgives those who trespass against her/him. Lead not _____ into temptation, but deliver her/him from the evil one. Let _____'s joy be your kingdom, your power, and your glory forever. Amen.

Training all generations to prayer for others can be challenging. One family reported their four year old took to simply calling out the numbers from the prayer list in the church bulletin. There are more thoughtful ways we can train ourselves and our children to pray. One way is to ask our children to use their imaginations. When thinking about a situation how would they imagine a

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different scenario. Asking God to create that new picture is a way of offering intercessory prayer. Even asking a child to draw a picture of the imagined outcome helps them to stay focused in their prayer for another.

FIVE-FINGERED PRAYER

This method is especially helpful for families with children who are learning to pray. Several versions of this exercise are in print. *Adapted from Reflecting God Leader's Guide, 31.*

- The Little Finger—this is the smallest and weakest finger. Pray for someone who is weak and feeling vulnerable right now.
- The Second Finger—this finger is seldom used alone. Still it is an important part of the team. Pray for someone who quietly works behind the scenes without fanfare or acclaim.
- The Middle Finger—this is the tallest on the hand. Pray for someone in high office with heavy responsibilities.
- The Index Finger—this is the hardest working of all the fingers. Pray for someone who works very hard.
- The Thumb—the thumb is the closest to you. Pray for someone you love very much.

PRAYER OF PETITION



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“Give us today our daily bread . . . deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 6: 11, 13).

ENCOUNTER THE CONCEPTS

Petition—asking God for gifts, strength, and grace—is important. In the sequence of prayer, it comes after adoration, thanksgiving, confession, and intercession, but it is still a vital part of prayer.

Concept 1: Richard Foster writes, “Petition . . . is not a lower form of prayer. It is our staple diet. In a childlike expression of faith we bring our daily needs and desires to our heavenly Father . . . It is a false humility to stand back and not share our deepest needs. His [God’s] heart is wounded by our reticence” (*Prayer*, 178-79).

Concept 2: Jesus never outgrew His need for the prayer of petition. That is a strong sign you and I won’t either.

Concept 3: Ways in which God answers our petitions:

- Yes, I thought you would never ask.
- Yes, and here’s more.
- Not yet.
- No, I love you too much.
- No, but My grace is sufficient.

Concept 4: “A day without prayer is a boast against God” (Owen Carr).

Concept 5: “God is always listening, more ready to hear than we are to pray” (William Barclay).

Concept 6: “Thy kingdom come (Luke 11:2, KJV) is a petition not for what we want, but for what God wants. We are so apt to think that prayer is asking God for what we want, whereas true prayer is asking God for what he wants.” *William Barclay*, “The Letters of John and Jude,” in *The Daily Study Bible Series*, 116

Concept 7: Jesus teaches us to pray, “Thy will be done” not “Thy will be changed.”

NOTES**EMBRACE THE WORD**

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15). St. John promises a lot. Several times in his writings he says we will receive what we ask for in prayer. Does that mean I can pray down the winning lottery numbers, a promotion to vice president, or a position on the Olympic team? No, John’s promises show we must pray in accordance with God’s will. Three times John records what might be called the conditions of answered prayer:

Obedience. We receive because we obey His commandments. “If our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in . . . Jesus Christ, and to love one another” (1 John 3:21-23).

Remaining in Christ. “If we abide in Him and He in us, we receive what we ask” (John 15:7). Remaining in moment-by-moment touch with Christ is a condition of prayer. William Barclay points out the closer we stay to Christ, the more often we will offer acceptable prayers, and the more we “pray aright, the greater the answer we receive.” *William Barclay, Daily Study Bible, Letters of John and Jude, 114-16.*

Praying in His name and for His sake. “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father” (John 14:13). The ultimate test for any prayer of petition is whether or not I can say directly to Jesus, “Give me this for Your sake and for the glory of Your name.”

APPLICATION



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1. Read Romans 8:26-27. Who is interceding for whom in this passage? Consider the following are some insightful teachings on intercession. Which ideas are new to you? Which has the most impact on your prayer life now?
2. We need grace even to pray the prayer of confession properly. Some of our motives are muddled or invisible to us even as we pray. Which of the following statements most nearly matches your own response to the teachings on confession presented in this module? *Statements adapted from the Reflecting God Workbook, 79.*
 - Lord, forgive me for not praying more for others.
 - I didn't know I could do so much to help.
 - God would never listen to me.
 - Intercession sounds heavy and depressing.
 - I will plan to pray for others every day—starting today.
 - I wish someone would pray for me like that.
3. Choose a family member or friend who needs you to intercede on their behalf. Use the method of (putting a ring or watch on the opposite hand or wrist) to pray for this person.
4. A tool for expanding our prayers when interceding for others is to use the prayers of the church. Written prayers used by the church across the ages can be a great resource. A copy of the Book of Common Prayer can provide some new prayer language when interceding for others.

Do an internet search for prayers written by A.W. Tozer, E.M. Bounds, Joyce Huggett, Emilie Griffin, or Joyce Rupp who have written prayers you can consider. Note: When utilizing any of these resources it is always important to understand that adaptation may be necessary given their theological commitments. The tools they provide are nevertheless helpful. If you have a book on prayer you have enjoyed check out the bibliography for good suggestions for further reading and resources.

NOTES**JOURNALING**

Note: Throughout your work in this module, it is suggested you keep a journal. This is an important tool in the study of spiritual formation. Journaling is a tool to help you slow down in your studies and listen to your heart, soul, mind, and most importantly to God.

- In your journal, write a prayer of confession that could be used in a worship service. Be sure to word it to take in all three dimensions of confession discussed in this module.
- Use one of the four methods of intercessory prayer explored in this module. After putting it into practice for several days, reflect on it in your journal.

SUGGESTED READING

- William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible, Letters of John and Jude* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 114-16.
- Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 25-33, 177-201.
- E. Dee Freeborn, et al., *The Upward Call* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994), 81-93.
- Wesley Tracy, et al., *Reflecting God* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City and Christian Holiness Partnership, 2000), 111-18.
- Wes Tracy, *Reflecting God Workbook*, 76-82.
- Wes Tracy, *Reflecting God Leader's Guide*, 30-32.
- Morris Weigelt and E. Dee Freeborn, *The Lord's Prayer: Design for Spiritual Formation* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2001).

EXAM



NOTES

1. Petition is a lower form of prayer.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. A life of prayer takes us inward to the transformation we need.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. Prayer does not change us.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. A life of prayer moves us upward into the intimacy and friendship with God that we long for.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Jesus outgrew His need for the prayer of petition.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. The best thing to do would be to ignore or deny our sin.
 - A. True
 - B. False
7. Intercession allows us to carry the suffering and sorrow of others.
 - A. True
 - B. False
8. The Wesleyan tradition teaches that God can cleanse the heart and fill it with divine love until sanctification is a reality.
 - A. True
 - B. False
9. Scriptures can be used to effectively pray for others.
 - A. True
 - B. False



10. Confession is the important first step to full reconciliation with God.
 - A. True
 - B. False

11. Jesus teaches us to pray, “Thy will be changed.”
 - A. True
 - B. False

12. A life of prayer moves us outward into the ministry and service we need.
 - A. True
 - B. False

13. The most holy among us are members of a fallen race and the fountain of a thousand infirmities.
 - A. True
 - B. False

14. All believers should be priests in prayer in behalf of one another.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Talk about one of the four methods of intercessory prayer explored in this module.
2. Explore with your mentor the different types of confession discussed in this module.
3. Discuss the concepts of the petition prayer (“Encountering the Concepts”) described in this module with your mentor.