



high school group study



jim burns

general editor

prayer &  
the devotional  
life



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# how to use the *uncommon* group bible studies

Each *Uncommon* group Bible study contains 12 sessions, which are divided into 3 stand-alone units of 4 sessions each. You may choose to teach all 12 sessions consecutively, to use just one unit, or to present individual sessions. You know your group, so do what works best for you and your students.

This is your leader's guidebook for teaching your group. Electronic files (in PDF format) of each session's student handouts are available for download at [www.gospellight.com/uncommon/](http://www.gospellight.com/uncommon/). The handouts include the "message," "dig," "apply," "reflect" and "meditation" sections of each study and have been formatted for easy printing. You may print as many copies as you need for your group.

Each session opens with a devotional meditation written for you, the youth leader. As hectic and trying as youth work is much of the time, it's important never to neglect your interior life. Use the devotions to refocus your heart and prepare yourself to share with kids the message that has already taken root in you. Each of the 12 sessions are divided into the following sections:

## **starter**

Young people will stay in your youth group if they feel comfortable and make friends in the group. This section is designed for you and the students to get to know each other better.

### **message**

The message section will introduce the Scripture reading for the session and get students thinking about how the passage applies to their lives.

### **dig**

Many young people are biblically illiterate. In this section, students will dig into the Word of God and will begin to interact on a personal level with the concepts.

### **apply**

Young people need the opportunity to think through the issues at hand. This section will get students talking about the passage of Scripture and interacting on important issues.

### **reflect**

The conclusion to the study will allow students to reflect on some of the issues presented in the study on a more personal level.

### **meditation**

A closing Scripture for the students to read and reflect on.



# unit I

## communicating with God

Before I started this curriculum project, I asked more than 150 of my youth ministry associates to rate their preferences for topics in the *Uncommon* group Bible studies. The number-one requested subject was prayer. It's interesting to me that a regular part of most every youth meeting and every worship service is prayer, but we rarely ever talk about it in our youth groups, Christian schools or even family devotions. Yet as missionary William Carey once wrote, "Prayer—secret, fervent, believing prayer—lies at the root of all personal godliness."

I am really glad you picked up this study, because on the following pages your students—and hopefully you—will be introduced to the depth and breadth of the role prayer plays in our spiritual lives. It's hard to just talk about prayer without praying. That's why I have included many opportunities for prayer and worship throughout the study. Experiential education tells us to not just talk about it . . . but also to *do it*.

When all is said and done, prayer is simply communication with God. And there isn't anything you can do that is more important than helping your students begin or continue the process of building a relationship of communication with the Creator, Savior and Sustainer of their lives.

I'm convinced that most young people (and adults as well) only pray the "God give me" prayer. Most people have the elements of prayer all messed up. We spend the vast majority of our time and energy asking for things and telling God what to do. But true prayer is much more than asking.

Praise frees our spirit to be in touch with our Creator. Thanksgiving gives us a proper attitude. Confession and forgiveness give us a right relationship with God, and asking our loving heavenly Father for His will and guidance reminds us of the depth of His love for us.

If your students aren't familiar with praise, thanksgiving, confession, asking and listening, then this is your opportunity to teach them these key biblical principles. You are placing some of the spiritual secrets of the master teacher, Jesus, at their feet.

Although prayer was the most-requested topic from youth workers, I doubt the students would have voted it number one. At camp, the class on prayer usually has a handful of faithful while the classes on sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll is standing-room only. That's okay. This study won't automatically change that trend. However, our job in this study is to get young people talking with God, to keep them talking to Him and have them enter into a deeper form of communication than ever before.

Don't get discouraged if some of your students aren't ready for a deeper communication with God. You are still placing before them spiritual truths that "will not return void" (see Isaiah

55:11). Let me leave you with this great thought from Richard Foster:

Healthy prayer necessitates frequent experiences of the common, earthy, run-of-the-mill variety. Like walks, and talks, and good wholesome laughter. Like work in the yard, and chitchat with the neighbors, and washing windows. Like loving our spouse, and playing with our kids, and working with our colleagues. To be spiritually fit to scale the Himalayas of the spirit, we need regular exercise in the hills and valleys of ordinary life.<sup>1</sup>

**Note**

1. Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1992), p. XII.





## session 1

# what is prayer?

*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.*

COLOSSIANS 4:2

The word “prayer” may bring reactions from the young people you teach that range from “I can’t do it!” to “I never think about it.” They may find it hard to believe that anyone *really* has a prayer life or relationship with God that goes beyond what they see in the outward action of church events.

Where could young people get such a notion? Could it be from the (gulp!) adults around them? They see us interact with each other and with them. But how do most young people *know* if an adult ever interacts with God? Sure, pastors and Sunday School teachers talk about God. Prayers are said at the beginning and end of every church activity. But all too often, prayer and intimacy with God are either dealt with in abstract terms or not at all.

Prayer is the power—the life-changing element—that creates passionate drive and immense change in the lives of people who

seek God. We do it in private, and we're reluctant to talk about it. Why is it so difficult to make our prayer lives public? Are we afraid that our students (or we) will get too fanatic? Or is it that when it comes to talking about our experiences, we really don't have that much to talk about?

That's where this lesson begins. When your intimacy with God becomes so exciting that your excitement spills over into the information this unit provides, your young people will begin to learn and experience, not just hear!

If you want to see the students you teach light up when they talk about real answers God has given them to their prayers . . . if you want to see them realize that they can go way beyond the "Now I lay me down to sleep" level of prayer that paralyzes much of Christendom . . . if there is even a spark of longing in your heart to see God make your own prayer life more powerful, more intimate, more life-changing . . . then you're on the right track! Give God all He wants of your prayer life.

Adults who eagerly evidence that they have been with God, and who comfortably talk about His powerful answers to prayer in their own lives, will take intimacy with God from the realm of the theoretical to the actual for young people. You can be the adult who proves to your students by your own life that intimacy with God is possible, real and life changing!

*Prayer is friendship with God.*

*Friendship is not formal, but it is not formless:*

*it has its cultivation, its behavior, its obligations, even its disciplines;*

*and the casual mind kills it.*

GEORGE ARTHUR BUTTRICK

## group study guide

# what is prayer?

### starter

WHAT'S BLOCKING YOUR PRAYER LIFE? Below is a list of potential prayer blockers. How often does each stand in the way of great communication with God?

	Often	Sometimes	Seldom
Lack of discipline	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not making prayer a priority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Falling asleep while praying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hectic schedule	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't feel God's presence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guilt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of faith God is listening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doubting His existence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Selfishness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Frustration in prayer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Daydreaming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Note:** You can download this group study guide in 8<sup>1/2</sup>" x 11<sup>1/2</sup>" format at [www.gospellight.com/uncommon/prayer\\_and\\_the\\_devotional\\_life.zip](http://www.gospellight.com/uncommon/prayer_and_the_devotional_life.zip).

What are the top three blockers in your life?

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Keep track of this list—today’s Bible study will help you face down your blockers during the next week.

### message

Before we do anything, it’s a good idea to know exactly what it is we want to do. (You wouldn’t try cave diving without knowing what it is first, right?) So, what is prayer? Simple: *Prayer is communicating with God*. Here’s the not-so-simple part: Just like communicating with other people, there are rules of the road that make communicating with God more effective. Learning these guidelines will help you open the line with Him and keep it open. Rich, deep and effective prayer contains five elements:

1. Praise
2. Thanksgiving
3. Confession
4. Asking
5. Listening

1. These elements come straight from God’s Word. Read each of the verses below. Which of the five elements of prayer do you find in the verse?

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).*

Element of prayer:

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*Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:18).*

Element of prayer:

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*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you (Matthew 7:7).*

Element of prayer:

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*I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High (Psalm 9:1-2).*

Element of prayer:

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*Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" (Mark 9:7).*

Element of prayer:

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- For each of the five elements, (1) write a definition, (2) describe why it is important, and (3) write a short prayer that demonstrates that element.

### **Praise**

Definition:

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Why it's important:

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Prayer of praise:

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**Thanksgiving**

Definition:

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Why it's important:

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Prayer of thanksgiving:

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**Confession**

Definition:

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Why it's important:

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Prayer of confession:

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**Asking**

Definition:

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Why it's important:

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Prayer of asking:

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**Listening**

Definition:

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Why it's important:

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Prayer of listening:

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3. Are all five elements of prayer necessary for a well-rounded prayer life? Why or why not?

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4. Which element(s) of prayer do you need to emphasize in your life right now? Why?

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### **dig**

One really good reason to incorporate all five elements of prayer into our daily conversations with God is the all-too-human tendency to treat Him like a vending machine: Put your prayer in the slot and out comes a prize! God wants us to ask for what we need . . . but what does that mean, exactly?

Regina Hammond, a 37-year-old flight attendant, won \$100,000 in a Colorado lottery game, on top of \$50,000 she won the previous year the same way. And she's not finished yet. Her goal is the \$1 million grand prize.

Hammond believes that prayer has paved her way to riches. "I pray to God to help me and He answers," she says.<sup>1</sup>

1. Do you think Regina Hammond will win the million dollars? Why or why not?

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2. How do you feel about Regina's claim that she is rich because of prayer?

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3. If prayer works, why don't all lottery players pray and win?

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4. Should people pray to get rich? To win sports events? To be successful? Explain.

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5. Some people feel lotteries are sinful and should be illegal. If that's true, why would God answer Regina's prayers to win?

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6. Would you pray to win a lottery? Why or why not?

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7. Check the items that you would feel comfortable asking God for:

- An A on a test
- Lots of money
- Getting a job
- A better complexion
- Winning a game
- New clothes
- Not to get caught drinking
- Getting a date
- Losing or gaining weight

8. Why is it okay to pray for the items you checked, as opposed to the other things? What's the difference?

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### **apply**

Prayer gives us the opportunity to share our lives with God, just like talking with friends and family allows us to share our lives with them. When we are in communication with God, we begin to see Him at work in our lives, shaping us into the people He wants us to be. The flipside is that failing to communicate with God often shuts the door to His work in our lives.

Even with loads of knowledge about the subject of prayer, the truth of the matter is that the only way to improve communica-

tion with God is *to pray*. But praying can be intimidating until you've had some practice.

1. Name three ways that prayer can bring you closer to God.

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. How is prayer different from a face-to-face conversation?

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3. Do you think the five elements of prayer can help you communicate with God more like you communicate in a face-to-face conversation? Why or why not?

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4. How can prayer be a dialogue with God rather than just a monologue?

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5. Do you hear from God in prayer? If so, how does He speak to you? If not, how can you can listen for His voice?

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### reflect

1. Read each of the following situations, and then consider ways the person can overcome his or her prayer blocker.

Situation 1: Jayden wants to spend more time in prayer, but he doesn't know how to fit one more thing in his crazy schedule. Between early-morning band rehearsal, after-school tennis practice and homework, the only time he can think to pray is just before he goes to bed. The problem: He keeps nodding off mid-prayer. What can Jayden do?

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Situation 2: Marcie and Dana decide that a great way to pray regularly is to pray together, so they make an appointment to video chat every morning for prayer. More often than not, however, Marcie and Dana find themselves chat-

ting with each other more than with God. What are some ways they can stay focused on God instead of themselves?

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Situation 3: When Stu prays, he spends most of the time begging God’s forgiveness for not praying enough. He feels bad about praying so rarely . . . and his guilt makes him want to pray even less! How can Stu get out of this vicious cycle and get on with praying?

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2. Remember your top three prayer blockers from this session’s starter? Write them below.

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

3. Write your personal “situation” for each of your top three blockers (use the stories in question 1 as examples).

Situation 1:

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Situation 2:

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Situation 3:

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- 4. Now give yourself some good advice. As you did for other people's situations in question 1, figure out a way to overcome each of your blockers.

Situation 1:

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Situation 2:

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Situation 3:

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Are you prepared to overcome your blockers and practice praying this week? To get started, find a partner or a small group and pray together. Don't forget to pray each of the five elements: (1) praise, (2) thanksgiving, (3) confession, (4) asking, and (5) listening.

**meditation**



In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice;  
in the morning I lay my requests before you  
and wait in expectation.

PSALM 5:3

**Note**

1. Adapted from "Woman Says Prayer Helped Her Win Lottery," *Headline News Discussion Starters* (Loveland, CO: Group, 1990), pp. 30-31. Used by permission.