

2026-10-28 Small Group Guide

Small Group Guide: Prayer, Faith, and Persistence

Based on 1 Kings 18 and Selected Passages

Introduction for Group Leaders

This sermon draws from the story of Elijah praying for rain after the confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. The pastor challenges believers to move beyond shallow, formulaic prayer into a deeper, more faithful walk with God. Use this guide to help your group reflect honestly on their own prayer lives and grow in their understanding of what it means to communicate with God.

Key Passages Referenced

1 Kings 17:1 -- Elijah declares to Ahab that rain will cease until he gives the word

1 Kings 18:41-46 -- Elijah prays for rain and sends his servant to watch for clouds

James 5:13-18 -- The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective

Matthew 21:18-22 -- Jesus curses the fig tree and teaches on faith in prayer

Key Takeaways

1. Prayer is a relationship, not a formula. The pastor warns against treating prayer like a shopping list or a lucky charm. Genuine prayer involves both speaking to God and listening for his direction, and it should grow and deepen over time just as any relationship does.

2. Faith speaks before it sees. Elijah told Ahab rain was coming before a single cloud appeared in the sky. His confidence was not in what he could observe but in what God had spoken. This kind of faith is willing to look foolish in the short term out of trust in God's word.

3. Persistence is part of the process. Elijah sent his servant back seven times before there was any sign of rain. The pastor challenges the group to consider how quickly they give up on prayer when they do not see immediate results.

4. Obedience does not require full understanding. The pastor emphasizes that waiting until everything makes sense before obeying God is not faith. Elijah followed God's instructions without always knowing how things would unfold, and that posture of surrender is what God calls each believer to.

5. Confession and community matter in prayer. Drawing from James 5, the pastor notes that healing and answered prayer are often connected to confession and praying together with others. We cannot separate our spiritual health from our willingness to be honest before God and one another.

Discussion Questions

Opening Question

Go around the group and share one word that describes your current prayer life. Do not explain it yet -- just name it.

Section 1: How We Pray

The pastor says that if your prayers are still the same ones you were saying as an eight or nine year old, it may be time to grow up spiritually. How have your prayers changed over the years? In what ways might they still need to grow?

He describes two common extremes -- praying only when in trouble, or reducing prayer to a brief thank you when things are going well. Which tendency do you lean toward, and why?

What does it look like practically to both speak to God and listen to God in prayer? Have you ever felt that God was communicating something to you? How did you respond?

Section 2: Faith Before Evidence

Elijah told Ahab to prepare for rain before there was a single cloud in the sky.

Can you think of a time when you felt God calling you to trust him for something before you had any evidence it would happen? What did you do?

The pastor says that playing it safe spiritually leads to a boring Christian life, and he even questions how genuinely Christian that kind of life is. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

He also warns that our need to reason and understand everything can become a barrier to obedience. Where do you see that tension in your own life between wanting to understand and being called to simply trust?

Section 3: Persistence and Community

Elijah's servant climbed the mountain seven times before seeing even a small cloud. What would have been lost if he had stopped at the third or fourth time? What does this suggest about the nature of persistent prayer?

The pastor points out that Elijah and his servant worked together -- one praying, one watching. How has another person's faith or partnership ever encouraged or sustained your own? Is there someone in your life currently who plays that role?

James 5:16 connects answered prayer to confessing sins to one another. The pastor observes that many people want prayer for healing but are reluctant to confess. How comfortable is your group with that kind of honesty? What would need to change for that to become more natural?

Section 4: The Hard Questions

The pastor openly admits that he does not always understand why some prayers seem to go unanswered, and he does not try to neatly resolve that tension. How do you personally handle seasons when prayer feels unanswered or when God seems silent?

Matthew 21:21-22 promises that faith-filled prayer can accomplish remarkable things, yet the pastor acknowledges that this does not always

seem to work out in practice. How does your group wrestle with passages like this? What questions do they raise for you?

James 4 warns that some prayers go unanswered because we ask with wrong motives. How do you discern whether your motives in prayer are aligned with God's will? Is that something you think about regularly?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to practice individually or as a group before your next meeting.

Audit your prayer life. Spend ten minutes this week writing down what you typically pray about. Then honestly ask yourself: Are these prayers growing deeper over time? Are they mostly requests, or do they include thanksgiving, confession, and listening? Bring your reflections back to the group.

Pray persistently for one specific thing. Identify one situation in your life or someone else's life where you have been tempted to give up praying. Commit to praying for it every day this week, even if you see no movement. Keep a simple log of what you pray and any shifts you notice in your own heart or circumstances.

Practice confessional prayer. If you are in a trusted relationship within the group, take a step toward the kind of honesty James 5 describes. This does not require sharing everything with everyone, but it may mean acknowledging to God and at least one other person an area where you have been holding back.

Ask God how to improve your prayer life. The pastor suggests a simple but often overlooked practice: ask God directly what your prayer life could look like if it were more aligned with his purposes. Spend time in silence after asking, and write down anything that comes to mind.

Involve someone else in your faith. Think of one person -- a friend, family member, or fellow believer -- you could invite into something you are trusting

God for. Share it with them and ask them to pray with you, even once.

Closing Reflection

The pastor closes with this thought from his prayer:

"May we trust that what we are praying is for your will to be done on earth just like in heaven."

Before ending your group time, invite each member to share one thing they want to bring before God this week -- not as a request to be fulfilled, but as an act of trust in who God is. Close by praying together, incorporating what each person shared.

For Further Study

1 Kings 17 -- The full account of Elijah before the Mount Carmel confrontation

James 1:2-8 -- On faith, doubt, and asking God for wisdom

James 4:1-3 -- On asking with wrong motives

Luke 18:1-8 -- The parable of the persistent widow and what it teaches about prayer

Romans 8:26-27 -- The Spirit interceding for us in prayer when we do not know what to pray