

NEW TERRITORY

WEEK 3

LIVE A BETTER STORY TEAM

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BOTTOM LINE

WHEN YOU'RE IN NEW TERRITORY, PRIORITIZE PRAYER.

WEEK SUMMARY

When we find ourselves in a situation that we didn't see coming, we typically respond in one of three ways: fight, flight, or freeze. The longer we find ourselves living in a new situation that's triggered one of these responses in us, the longer that state of being begins to take its toll on our whole being. Our physical health, our emotions, our mental capacity, our relationships—they all seem to suffer when we're stuck fighting, fleeing, or frozen in the face of the unexpected.

But what if we could add a fourth response—a fourth possibility—to that list? What if we responded to new and unexpected situations with a different response that actually was healthy for the long-term? What if we could approach new and unfamiliar territories with a sense of calm? A sense of peace that could help us make better decisions?

The reality is that God has a lot to say about new seasons and new territory. And not only does He not want us to operate out of only fight, flight, or freeze, He wants us to actually thrive and succeed in the face of changes in our lives. In fact, God has given us everything we need so that we *will* thrive. This week, we'll discover the key to keeping unhealthy responses at bay, and living with a fresh and new perspective to our changing circumstances.

THINK ABOUT THIS

For Christians, prayer is like breathing. Or rather, it *should* be like breathing. Last week, hopefully, you took the suggestion to take some time and write out specific requests for each person in your group. This week is a great opportunity to follow-up on that challenge by continuing to pray boldly and intentionally for those requests for the duration of this series.

This is also a great week to talk about fear, as we open by talking about the three different ways people tend to react in unexpected situations: fight, flight, and freeze. As you talk about those reactions as a group, you have the opportunity to point people toward having a conversation with God in those difficult moments. So, have an honest dialogue about what we can realistically expect and not expect from God through prayer. There are a lot of things that prayer is, and there are a lot of things that prayer is not. Your conversation can help your group figure out more of both.

Ask your group what the discipline of prayer looks like in their lives. How did they develop this discipline? Did it take practice? Or was it intuitive? Has the role of prayer changed in their lives over time? So much of prayer is about the person we become in the process, not about what we receive when we do it. Encourage your group to see prayers as a chance to have more conversations and intimacy with God.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 6:5-6

"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Romans 12:2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.



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CONTEXT AND PREP

The essence of prayer is simply talking to God as you would to a close friend: without pretense or flippancy. With a friend, you don't edit your words; you're not afraid of what they may think of you. Yet, it is taking on that very attitude toward prayer that so many people have trouble.

Because talking with God is so vital, and prayer so effective in the fulfillment of God's plan, the enemy attempts constantly to introduce errors into our understanding of and commitment to prayer. This isn't anything new. Every generation faces the necessity to re-prioritize a confused perception of prayer. For many, prayer has been replaced with pragmatic action. Function overrides fellowship with God; busyness crowds out communication. For others, prayer lacks a sense of awe and respect. Those efforts become flippant, disrespectful, and irreverent. Then, there are those who believe prayer is designed to make demands or claims on God. They attempt to force Him to do what they believe He should do for them. And finally, for some, prayer is nothing more than a routine ritual; it's just something done without any clear reason.

This week provides an opportunity to really evaluate, or re-evaluate the perception of prayer, and the role of talking with God in the life of every believer.



CONTINUING THE EXPERIENCE

Do you ever wish you could strategically communicate with your small group outside of group time? Ever wish you could find a way to share quick snippets of what they're learning or even send a word of encouragement to them?

Well . . . now you can.

The communication plan is designed to help your small group attenders engage with the truths in that week's group time. Below you'll find bite-size content that you can send through

text or post on social media for your group members. There are texts, posts for Facebook and Instagram, and images that you can use. And they're all designed to help your attenders connect with the week's topic.

Remember to make these posts and texts yours. Don't feel like you have to use all of the content provided in a given series. Use this plan as a starting point as you leverage technology with your small group.

TEXT MESSAGES

SEND THIS TO EVERYONE IN YOUR GROUP:

How is everyone doing with the goals they set this week? I'm looking forward to hearing about any new developments when we meet again. See you next week!

SEND THIS TO ANYONE WHO MISSED GROUP THIS WEEK:

(Leader: You can find the audio file in your downloads. Use a service like Google Drive or Dropbox to share it.)

Hey—we missed you at group this week! If you want to catch up on the latest week in our series, here's the link!

SEND THIS TO ONE OR TWO PEOPLE IN YOUR GROUP, JUST BECAUSE:

I really appreciated what you shared in group this week. It was so thoughtful and helpful. Thank you for trusting us. I'm grateful for you.

SOCIAL MEDIA

POST THIS TO YOUR FACEBOOK OR INSTAGRAM:

Prayer isn't all about something you get; it's about the person you become.





FOR THE LEADER

Remember to email your small group every week with a reminder of when small group meets, directions, and any information that would be helpful for them. To make it simple, just **copy and paste the email below**, and fill in any information that you think your group members might need to know. Since every group and leader is different, feel free to change the email text to fit your group.

WEEK 3 EMAIL

Hey everyone!

We're in the third week of *New Territory*, and this week, we'll be talking about prayer. I realize that prayer can be a familiar topic for most of us, and there could be a temptation to zone out. But I think you will really enjoy this week's perspective on prayer as it specifically relates to stepping into spaces and seasons of our lives. See you all at group!

Here are the details for our meeting:

Date/Time:

Address:

Our weekly Bible Reading Plan and the questions for this week are attached. See you all soon!



OVERVIEW

Wouldn't it be awesome if you could help your small group members engage with God's Word all week long, instead of just during your weekly small group time? That's the intention of the Bible Reading Plan that goes along with this series.

Every week of a series comes with five unique verses and five unique devotions to help your small group members think about and engage with Scripture throughout the week. Each Scripture image can be found in the "Graphics" folder of the series download, and each daily Scripture can be found below.

HOW TO USE

We've designed these images and devotions to be flexible enough to use in a wide variety of ways. But to help you get started, here are three things you might want to try:

1. POST THEM. These images and devotions work perfectly on social media!

2. TEXT THEM. If you're looking for a more personal way to encourage your group members to read Scripture, try texting

each day's Scripture and devotion to the group. Of course, we're all busy. So to save time, you may want to sign up for an online texting service and schedule those in advance. Feel free to send a picture of the devotion if that's easier.

3. PRINT OR EMAIL THEM. An easy way to have your group use the Bible Reading Plan is to simply print or email the next few pages. That way they have each day's reading before the week begins.

DAILY SCRIPTURE

Monday (Day 1) 1 Corinthians 14:15

So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.

Tuesday (Day 2) Matthew 21:22

"If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Wednesday (Day 3) Luke 11:1

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

Thursday (Day 4) James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters] whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Friday (Day 5) Ephesians 3:12

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.



DAY 1

Prayer is one of the most fulfilling aspects of our relationship with God. It's a time set aside to simply listen to God, to place our lives in His hands, and to speak in response to the desires of His heart.

First, Jesus teaches us that we are to pray in secret. What an amazing God we have that He desires to meet with us in secret! All of us have a longing to know our Creator in a way that no one else does. We each need a secret place with the One who formed us and knows every detail of our lives. It's vital to our relationship with God that we set aside time to listen to Him and talk with Him one-on-one. It's in this secret place that our relationship with Him will go deeper, and our lives will be radically transformed.

Jesus also teaches us not to fill our prayers with meaningless words. He makes it clear that prayer is more about a relationship with the Father than the words we say. Prayer is more about the heart than the lips. It's

about opening our hearts to God and letting Him show us His plan for transformation, in both our lives and the world around us. Mother Theresa said, "Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts." So, how will you let God change your heart toward prayer this week?

DAY 2



Prayer is a two-way conversation; it is our talking to God and His talking to us. As a Christian, sometimes we read verses like these and think God is like a vending machine. Like, if we just ask for exactly what we want, He'll deliver it to us right away. But the reality is, that couldn't be further from the truth. God is not emotionless. He is not a machine there to blindly spit out our requests.

So what exactly does this verse mean to us, then? Well, for starters, it's a reminder that a prayer-less person is a powerless person. God wants us to know Him so intimately that we have every bit of confidence to trust that He is who He says He is. That He can and will do what He says He will do. When we approach prayer with this kind of confidence, we would be silly not to ask Him for what we need. But the point isn't really about asking; it's about knowing who God is. It's about believing that He is a God who cares about us and our needs. A God who wants to provide for us.

What prayer requests are on your heart right now? Instead of praying only for those things, pray first that God would help you have the confidence and faith to believe He can do all the things He's promised to do for you.



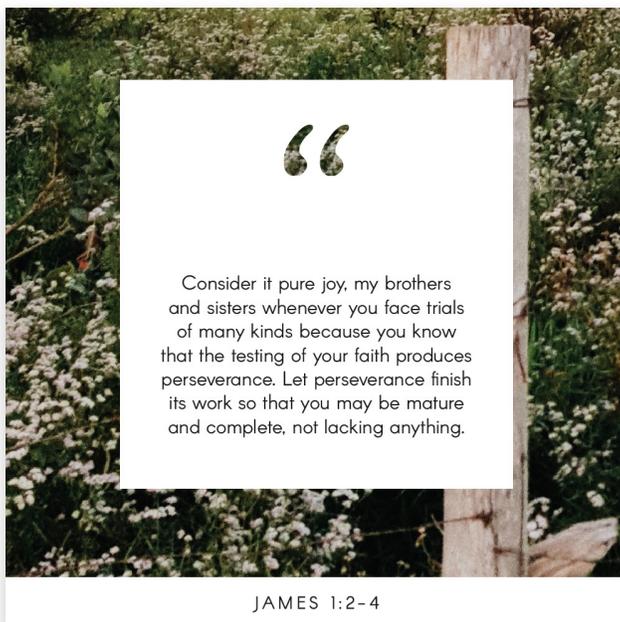
DAY 3



Prayer is not usually a normal part of someone’s life. But when a person begins a relationship with God, they have a new means of communication: prayer. Prayer is a way that the life of God in us gets nourished. The biblical purpose of prayer is that we may get to know God Himself. In some ways, the disciples were asking Jesus how to pray because they knew this was how they would get to know God as the Father. The same is true for us! When we approach prayer with the heart to know more of who God is in the process, we can rest assured that we’re approaching prayer in the best way.

To say that “prayer changes things” is not as close to the truth as saying, “Prayer changes ME and then I change things.” Prayer is not a matter of changing things externally, but it does have a way of working miracles in a person’s heart, mind, and perspective. The more we pray with a heart to see our relationship with God changed, the more we’ll see ourselves changed in the process.

DAY 4



What trials have you faced in the past? What trials are you currently facing? Is joy the emotion that stirs up within you when you think about your problems? Chances are, it’s not! That’s because it’s so counterintuitive to feel joy when life is hard.

For most people, the first instinct in the face of a trial is to avoid it at all costs. We’d rather pretend like it doesn’t exist. But James very clearly commands us to count trials as joy. To run at them head-on, for the sake of being transformed into a faith-filled, steadfast child of God. God sees our trials differently. He sees them as a chance to produce character within us, not as a circumstance intended to harm us, or to derail His plans for our lives.

The greatest gift we’ve been given in the face of trials is faith. When problems are staring at us head-on, it’s hard to see much else around them. But in order to face trials the way God intends, we must have faith. We have to believe that God has an outcome that will be

as beneficial as the trial is hard. We have to have faith that God will see us through every problem that stands in our way, and produce in us a steadfastness on which we can experience abundant life. We have to look for ways to experience His joy in the face of our circumstances.

Spend time in prayer today; allow God’s Word to fill you with fresh perspective about your trials and tribulations.



DAY 5

In a society that prizes self-confidence and a positive self-image, we might be tempted to think that our relationship with God should prize the same things. That we should make a priority of focusing on ourselves, our own needs, and our sense of self-worth when we pray.

But consider what happens when we pray to God with that intent only. When we believe that our relationship with God is based on our own merit and interests, we'll find prayer an empty ritual. We may tend to see little need for prayer, and we probably won't see the results we expect. Prayers offered in our own strength rise no higher than the roof over our heads.

But as believers in Christ, we must always remember what God has accomplished for us through Jesus. The key to effective prayer is to turn away from a trust in our own selves, and turn toward a total reliance on our Savior. Jesus is the mediator of our salvation, and of all

other dimensions of our relationship to God. Our confidence is based on what Christ has accomplished! Even when we struggle with doubt and sin, through Christ we have access to God the Father. And it is for that reason we can have every bit of confidence we need, both in prayer and in God's work in us.

NOTES, PRAYERS, AND THOUGHTS FOR THIS WEEK:

A large, empty rectangular area intended for notes, prayers, and thoughts for the week.



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SCRIPTURE

Matthew 6:5-6

"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Romans 12:2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are a guide to get the conversation started in your group—don't feel like you need to ask everything you see here! As long as you're having a conversation, you're on the right track. Also, feel free to adjust the questions to fit the needs of your specific group.

1. Is your natural tendency in the face of unexpected situations fight, flight, or freeze? Why is that?
2. When you hear the word *pray*, what comes to mind right away?
3. Who first taught you about the idea of prayer? Is what you were taught then different than what you believe now? Why or why not?
4. Do you have a regular prayer routine in your life? If so, what is it? If not, are you interested in creating one?
5. Read Romans 12:2 as a group. Practically, how do you renew your mind? Why is this important? How might this be helpful in your life?
6. If you were counseling someone who just saw prayer as a way to get what they wanted, what would you say to them? How might you help them shift their perspective?
7. Do ever find yourself not wanting to be completely honest when praying? Why or why not?



BOTTOM LINE

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INTRODUCTION

In 1927, American physiologist Walter Cannon coined a phrase for how people respond to being scared: *fight-or-flight*. And it's true, right? If we somehow found ourselves in a dangerous or unsafe situation, in order to protect ourselves or our loved ones, we'd either stand our ground and fight, or we'd take off. Pretty reasonable reactions.

Years later, researchers added a third possibility: fight, flight, or *freeze*.

You can guess what the freeze response looks like. You get frightened, and then you don't do *anything*. You try to protect yourself by simply staying right where you are.

Imagine you're driving your car and you see another driver not stopping at a four-way stop.

The fight response would involve you laying on your horn.

The flight response would be speeding up to get away from the car.

The freeze response would be not doing anything and hoping you miss the other car.

Now, a key part of this concept is that all of these responses are designed for us to deal with *temporary* threats. The adrenaline pump you feel in these responses to danger isn't sustainable over time. But, when we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory—or in a new territory—for a long period of time, we can find ourselves *living* in a fight, flight, or freeze response. Subjecting our bodies for long periods of time to this can lead to exhaustion, burnout, or even make us susceptible to getting sick. It's not an ideal way to live.

TENSION

Now, many of us have experienced this long fight, flight, or freeze response during the pandemic. For those of you who responded with the *fight* response, it may have looked like:

- Feeling more irritable.
- Being argumentative with family.
- Driving around town, hoarding sanitizer and toilet paper.

For those of you who had the *flight* response, it may have looked like:

- Hiding out at home. Like, all the time. You refused to engage in any activities outside your home—even if they were deemed safe.
- It was even difficult to go on walks outside or to the grocery store.
- You may have found yourself doing a lot of people-pleasing with friends and family in order to avoid conflict or confrontation.

For those of you with the *freeze* response, it may have looked like:

- Numbing your feelings with food or alcohol.
- Spending a lot of time on social media.
- Binging an excessive amount of TV shows.

These are all typical responses to fear in the midst of a global pandemic. But here's the thing: none of these responses are necessarily healthy. And the reason we make unhealthy decisions in these situations is because fear can shut down our reasoning and logic during the fight, flight, or freeze response. Very few decisions made in fear are healthy.

But what if we could add a fourth response—a fourth possibility—to the list? What if we responded to new and unexpected situations with a different response? What if we could find ourselves in new and unfamiliar territories, but find a sense of calm that can lead us to make better decisions?

What if our response was one of *faith*, not fight? What if our response was one of *prayer*, not flight? Of going straight to our heavenly Father to get His perspective on the situation we find ourselves in?

I get how that can sound naive or simplistic, because oftentimes, prayer feels like the last thing we want to do.



Prayer doesn't feel very actionable. It feels, I don't know, slow. It can feel like it's only something we're supposed to do, *instead* of something that's actually helping the situation.

More often than not, prayer seems complicated, uncomfortable, or maybe even boring. For some of us, we just don't think prayer really "works." Because how many times have we prayed, and God didn't seem to change it or fix it or answer it?

But what if this isn't what God has in mind for us in our communication with Him? What if it's not just about getting our way, or getting our answer, or changing our circumstances? Is it possible that our perception about prayer is way off? And what if the key to finding ourselves thriving in a new territory is finding a new way to pray? A way of praying that keeps the fight, flight, or freeze responses at bay, and gives us a new understanding and perspective of our current circumstances?

TRUTH

Now, as we read last week, the Israelites were at a pivotal moment. Their longtime leader Moses had died and a new leader, Joshua, was stepping in to bring them into a new territory. And this new land was unfamiliar and full of uncertainty. But God reassured Joshua by instructing him to keep his mind focused on the truth: God's Word. Years later, the apostle Paul echoed this message by telling the Colossian church to set their minds on things above.

So, in this process of "*setting our mind on things above*," we instinctively know that prayer is a part of that process. But how? What exactly is prayer supposed to do? What outcomes should we expect from prayer, and what outcomes should we not expect? There are examples of prayer all throughout Scripture, but in the Gospels, Jesus told us that there's a predictable outcome for prayer. A reward for prayer. So, let's look at what Jesus had to say:

"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:5-6).

First, Jesus said, "When you pray . . ." So for Jesus, there was an assumption that we would, in fact, be praying. And I think most of us would say that we *do* pray. We pray for

things like, "*God, get this guy out of my way on the highway,*" or "*Help me find a parking space,*" or "*Thank You for this day*" or "*Thank You for this food.*" And I'm not saying that you shouldn't pray those prayers, but that's not what Jesus was implying here. Jesus was talking about intentional and conversational prayer. For Jesus, prayer—time with God—should simultaneously be something that's built into your life, and something that builds your life. It should be a habit. It should be a *discipline*.

Now, we all know what discipline is. It's an intentional and deliberate interference to your normal routine. It's something you have to try to start doing. It's something that's learned. So, when we respond to a new territory with prayer? It's not a natural response. It's learned. It takes practice and repetition. Jesus' hope for us was that prayer becomes a *when* and not an *if* in our lives.

Jesus then went on to say that when we pray, we should shut the door and pray in our closet. In other words, there's an element to this kind of prayer that's private, that's personal. This is away from what normally happens in your routine. And He said not to just go into your room, but to close the door. Maybe, in a modern translation, we could add "*put down our phones.*" He wants us to focus on Him, away from all the distractions of this world.

Imagine it like the moments when you're with the person you love most in the world. In those moments, it can seem like the world's problems fade away, even if it's for just a few minutes. All your attention is on them, which causes everything else to move to the background. Our heavenly Father wants our attention like that. Because if we can get alone with God—to talk and listen—He has this amazing ability to take our attention off our problems, and place it on Him.

Jesus said if we do that, "*Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*"

Jesus told us that there's a reward attached to our private prayer life. Now, you might say "*I'm not doing this for a reward.*" That's fine. But it doesn't matter. Jesus said God's going to reward you anyway. And what's the reward? Well, Jesus doesn't explicitly tell us. But I know what the reward isn't. The reward isn't God saying "yes" to all of our prayers. The reward isn't that we get the new car, or the job, or that she says "yes" to the date. That's not how God works. That's how a genie works.

But I think one reward for consistent prayer is that when we find ourselves in a new territory situation where the fight,



flight, or freeze response wants to kick in, faith kicks in instead. In those moments, we don't become a person of fear. Instead, we become a person who exhibits love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—the fruit of God's Spirit in us.

Prayer isn't all about something you get, it's about the person you become. God wants to develop you and grow you to be a person who is more like Jesus. Jesus stepped out of heaven into a new territory, and displayed love and grace, peace and patience to the world.

Like the Scripture we looked at a couple of weeks ago, Paul wrote this in his letter to the Roman church:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

A big part of renewing our minds begins with consistent prayer. It's what readies us and steadies us, when the fear and confusion of a new season inevitably comes at us. So think of it this way:

When you're in new territory, prioritize prayer.

APPLICATION

But how do you start doing this? When it comes to prayer, we tend to make things more complicated than they need to be. In fact, there are two simple ways to begin incorporating daily prayer into your life.

1. First, **pick a time.** Making a scheduled time for prayer helps us prioritize prayer. If we don't pick a time, chances are, life and business will keep us from praying.
2. Once you pick a time, **pick a place.** It could be anywhere you can have privacy and quietness. Maybe it's your bedroom. Maybe it's a guestroom. Maybe it's actually a literal closet. Maybe it's your car. Maybe it's on a greenway. Whatever the space, find a place that will allow you a few minutes of peaceful prayer.

Now, if you're unfamiliar with prayer, you may be thinking, *I don't know how to do this! What do I even pray? What do I even say?* If that's you, you're normal! Simply tell God you don't know what to say. Prayer, at its heart, is honesty. So, what's the most honest thing you can say?

"I'm tired."

"I'm confused."

"I'm hurt."

"I don't know how to look at the future."

"I'm scared for the people I love."

"I'm scared for me."

"I'm worried about the future."

"I need more patience."

"I need more joy."

Prayer is spiritual honesty. Take yourself off the hook of having to say something that's profound. Just be honest. As you grow in prayer, ask God to build you into the type of person who walks in faith in new seasons, not in fear.

So, find a time and a place every day so prayer becomes proactive instead of reactive. Find a time and a place every day so prayer is something that builds your life up, instead of something you only use to bail your life out.

LANDING

Prayer is simply about connecting with God. It's not an attempt to change God's mind about us, or about events. Instead, prayer can change us, so that things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and forgiveness can resound within us in difficult times. Prayer builds a well of resilience inside of us. So, find a time and place, be honest with your heavenly Father, and find yourself being led, guided, and loved as you walk into new territories, every day.