

THE PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Setting aside time to be with God is the best investment of your time. This prayer experience will be a time to listen to God's heart, see God's nature and understand God's character. It is important that the group settles on a day for the prayer experience this week. Yes, 3 hours of prayer seems daunting and some of the people in your class may not be enthusiastic about it. That is why we share practical tips for a guided, intentional and beneficial experience. We hope this information is helpful as you build and lead your prayer experience. Feel free to edit and communicate part or all of this information to your group.

Where should we meet?

Choose a location that's not busy, cluttered or noisy. Choose a place that has an open feeling to it, not crowded. The church building is an ideal for a Saturday morning or Sunday afternoon prayer experience.

What's the ideal time to meet?

Try to pick a time when people can actually "leave it all behind." For some groups, this will be a Saturday morning or Sunday afternoon. For others, this will mean meeting in the evening. Do what's best for your group.

What will we need?

Bible, journal, comfortable shoes, seasonal items (sunglasses, sunscreen, blanket, gloves, coats, boots), and whatever food you've volunteered to bring

Do not bring: laptop, recreational reading, anything that will distract you

As you approach this prayer experience, consider this simply yet profound invitation...

- **Cease:** Make the choice to stop your daily activities to make space for this experience so you can be quiet, fully attentive and ready to receive from God.
- **Rest:** Give yourself permission to rest. Resting is an essential element of preparing to hear from the One who loves you with intimate affection.
- **Refresh:** Spiritual refreshment is one of the intentional outcomes of this experience. This refreshment comes to us through many ways: the Word, the beauty of creation, silence and solitude, large blocks of time to pray, enjoy a meal, write in a journal, etc.
- **Renew:** Make note of the places where you sense God calling you into a deeper relationship with him. Renewal occurs when we reflect on the ways God is inviting us to follow him – by hopping off the treadmill of activity, turning off the constant noise around us and becoming attentive to his daily invitation to draw near and follow him.

- **Read:** Slowly and carefully read any Scripture incorporated into your prayer experience. With the Bible, the longer you sit and linger in a short passage, the more you will get out of this simple reading. Consider asking these questions as you read, “What does this teach me about God?”, “What does this teach me about me?” and “What will I do about this?”
- **Feast:** Prayer experiences are not designed to be somber experiences. They’re intended to be delightful times to find joy in your walk with the Lord. In your group, strive for a healthy rhythm of silent, alone time and time together with others. There’s room for laughter and joyfully sharing what God’s doing among us.
- **Embrace:** Through this prayer experience, it is important to embrace the life God is inviting you to experience. At the beginning of the prayer time, you may sense a need to recommit your life Christ. As the retreat continues, you’ll find yourself embracing fellowship with God. It’s important in this time to embrace the life you have today, and the renewed life God has in store for you.

What schedule or format should I use?

Whatever fits best for you and your group. There are options in the Participant Guide and in the Facilitator Guide. There are two very detailed agendas below show you an example of how you could structure your time.

Option A (from *Meditating on God’s Word, a soul care retreat guide from Leadership Transformations, Inc.*)

- Arrival:** Plan an arrival time (about 30 minutes prior to start time) that allows people to get settled and to feel comfortable in the environment.
- 3:00pm:** Opening Prayer, Explanation of Schedule, Reading from Scripture to set up your time together (Ps 147 is a great passage)
- 3:10pm:** Alone time reading Scripture (the passage[s] read by the leader in the previous section), journaling and inviting God to speak during your prayer time
- Read through the passage 3 - 4 times. Read it slowly and rest on a word or phrase that jumps out to you. Reflect on what God is saying.
 - Spend some time in prayer. How is God leading you? Repent, give thanks, ask for guidance, rest in his love – do whatever God is calling you to.
 - Consider: How is God revealing himself to you in his word? Don’t rush this. Don’t try to arrive somewhere. Take your time. Soak in who God is.
- 3:30pm:** Sit somewhere. Go on a walk, spend some time on a swing. Observe nature. Do something individually that gives space for soaking in who God is.
- 4:00pm:** Gather together as a group and share what you heard while studying Scripture, journaling and observing nature.

- 4:30pm:** Spend some time praying as a group, thanking God for what he's shown you and asking for his guidance to do the things he's invited you into
- 5:00pm:** End your time with a meal, shared in a spirit of gratitude and praise. Ask for God's blessing on your meal. Pray and Dismiss

Option B (from the Rooted book, page)

- Arrival:** Plan an arrival time (about 30 minutes prior to start time) that allows people to get settled and to feel comfortable in the environment.
- 4:00pm:** Begin with a devotional reading to prepare for the prayer experience, explain what prayer is (communication with God), why it's important (develops our relationship with him) and what your hopes are for this experience
- 4:30pm:** Individual Prayer Time using this outline:
- Praise/Worship/Thanksgiving - what things in your life can you praise, worship and give thanks for? (health, a job, marriage, education, peace, friends, faith, parents, etc)
 - Confession - what sins/habits are holding you back? Confess specific sins the Holy Spirit may highlight for you.
 - Ask - In **Mark 10:51**, Jesus asked the blind man, "*what do you want me to do for you?*" If Jesus were to ask you the same question today, how would you respond? What do you want the Lord to do for you?
- 5:00pm:** Gather together and share how you heard God's voice
- What did this prayer time mean to you? How did it affect you?
 - How did fasting prepare you for this experience?
 - Share any other relevant feelings or thoughts about this experience or what you learned in and through it.
- 5:30pm:** Pray together as a group. You may take different postures (praying in twos or threes, walking around the church to pray for the church, holding a map of the country and the world as you pray). You may divide these prayer points among different people and have each pray for one or the other.
- Family, friends, specific needs from your journaling
 - For your Rooted Group requests
 - For Ridge Point and the global Church
 - For your purpose
 - For those with whom God wants you to share your faith story
 - Our communities
 - Our nation and leaders
 - The world and world leaders
 - What God wants your group to do, where you should serve
 - People in whom God wants you to invest
 - Pray for strength to pursue his will

6:30pm: Debrief and Celebration

Option C (For those already familiar with prayer)

Think of the prayer experience as a movement upwards, inwards and outwards.

a. Upwards: Worship, Praise, and Adoration to draw us into His Presence.

- We gather together as a group to reflect on God's nature, character and goodness and express thankfulness for who God is.
- We acknowledge our need for God and invite him to draw near to us and that we may recognize His presence.
- We will become more conscious of sins in our lives. This is not to condemn but to draw us to repentance. Repentance is the response that follows as we encounter a merciful and gracious God.

Suggested verses: Psalm 42:1-2, Psalm 139, Psalm 145, Psalm 147

b. Inwards: Read and Reflect on the truth as God speaks to us through His Word and His Spirit and we respond in prayer.

- We spent time by ourselves to present our needs before God. God cares for the "small" and the "big" needs in our lives, physical, emotions, spiritual, financial, social and psychological.
- We ask in Faith believing that God hears us and will answer our prayers. So, we must learn to be open, specific & sincerely as we bring our needs to God.

Suggested verses: Philippians 4:6, Philippians 4:19, Romans 12:1-11, Jeremiah 29:11

c. Outwards: God desires us to pray and stand in the gap for others.

- We gather together as a group and to pray for the needs of others in our families, rooted group, community, nation and world.
- We pray for the sick, the destitute, those who don't know Christ, etc.

Suggested verses: 1 Timothy 1:22, Ephesians 1

Ending your Prayer Experience

You may want to end your prayer experience with a meal (in case you were fasting). The meal is a good way to break the fast but also to debrief the experience. In case your group is combining the prayer experience with the weekly class, proceed with the class discussion during your meal.

Notes:

- Variety is important, so you do not get bored or distracted as you pray and meditate on God's Word. Take on different postures and activities; walk, stand, sit, pray aloud, sing, etc. Incorporate distracting thoughts into your prayers. If it is helpful, print out the Bible verses and hand them out. Make sure you debrief this experience: How did God speak to you? Where did God show up?
- Please review the Rooted Facilitator Guide for further guidance for both Week 3 and the prayer experience.