

How to Pray for Your Small-Group Ministry

Head to battle with the appropriate spiritual weapons.

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Our small-group ministries are on the front lines of serving the body of Christ. No other ministry in the church consistently serves such a heterogeneous audience. Needy people and well-resourced people; new believers and veterans in the faith; people of all ages, backgrounds, and demographics are all part of our audience. How can one ministry serve such a widely disparate flock?

"With man this is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27). We take encouragement from knowing that all things are possible with God, but the first part of Jesus' response is just as important. With man alone, effective, life-changing ministry is *impossible*. We might see a few victories here and there, but truly God-honoring service won't happen by merely human effort.

All the efforts we put into our small-group ministries—planning, recruiting, communicating, discipling—will have little life-changing impact if carried out in our own strength, regardless of our level of talent or giftedness. These efforts are needed, but they're not enough. It's crucial that we support our ministries with prayer.

Pray for Your Ministry

"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans" (Proverbs 16:3). Begin by committing the ministry itself to God in prayer. We plan and provide direction, but much of what happens in the small-group ministry is beyond our control. Boundaries and resourcing for the ministry are often set by church leadership. The pool of available, willing, and capable small-group leaders fluctuates over time. The list of people interested in participating in small groups ebbs and flows.

One way to begin praying for your ministry is to seek God's leading in your own life. Here are a few suggestions for prayer:

- Follow Solomon's example and ask God for wisdom to lead the ministry effectively ([1 Kings 3:5-15](#); see [James 1:5](#))
- Ask God to grant you humility and a servant's heart ([Philippians 2:3-4](#))
- Pray for a deep, abiding connectedness with Jesus, the Vine ([John 15:1-8](#))

Praying for our ministry means recognizing that the ministry is in God's hands, not ours. This can be very freeing. As we realize that the ministry belongs to God, we're able to place the results—numerical growth, discipleship, etc.—in his hands.

The Lord's Prayer ([Matthew 6:9-13](#)) is a great place to start praying for your ministry. To pray this prayer most effectively, we need to ask ourselves a few questions:

- What would it look like for God's name to be honored in my ministry?
- If his kingdom were truly to come in and through my ministry, what difference would that make in the group members' lives, in the ministry as a whole, and in my church?
- What would God's will be for my groups, group leaders, and members?
- What sorts of temptation and evil might impact my ministry?

Pray for Your Small-Group Leaders

Small group leadership can be rewarding and encouraging, bearing obvious fruit in and through the lives of the small-group members. It can also be lonely and taxing. As point people, it's difficult for us to keep on top of every group, knowing exactly what each leader needs. But there is One who has the very hairs of their heads numbered, and He knows what our leaders need today, and what they will face in the near future. The most effective support we can give our leaders is to pray for them.

All of the things you've prayed for yourself (see above) can also be prayed for your leaders. Here are a few additional suggestions:

- Ask God to empower your leaders to honor him with their lives. Pray for protection from temptation and for delivery from all kinds of evil.
- Pray for God's will to be done in bringing spiritual growth in your leaders.
- Ask God to grant your leaders forgiving spirits (small-group leaders often have more to forgive than others!)

Pray for Your Small Groups

Paul's prayers for the churches make a great place to start praying for small groups—which, after all, are manifestations of the church. Consider these examples:

- [Colossians 1:9-14](#): knowing God's will, spiritual wisdom and fruit, growth in knowledge of God, endurance, patience, joy, gratitude

- [Ephesians 1:17-19](#): spiritual wisdom and revelation, knowledge of God and of their hope as believers
- [Ephesians 3:14-21](#): spiritual power and faith, knowledge of Christ's love, being filled with God's fullness

These and other prayers of Paul can help us pray for our small groups.

A major success factor in any small group is meaningful relationships. Here are a few ways to pray for relationships in your small groups:

- Pray for a spirit of grace and forgiveness among group members ([James 1:19](#) and [Matthew 6:12, 14-15](#)).
- Pray for humility ([Philippians 2:1-5](#)).
- Ask God to protect the groups from grumbling and complaining spirits ([Philippians 2:14-15](#)).
- Ask God to create environments of encouragement ([1 Thessalonians 5:11](#)).
- Pray that God will reveal small-group members' spiritual gifts and create opportunities for those gifts to be used to honor him and serve the groups.
- Pray for appropriate levels of intimacy, accountability, and confidentiality.
- Ask God to lead new people into the right small groups, and pray for a spirit of acceptance and welcoming.

Finally, any training that we provide for leaders—whether on selecting Bible studies, developing relationships, identifying a mission for the group, or any other topic—should be an item of prayer for our groups and group leaders.

Create a Prayerful Environment

Because the small-group ministry depends wholly on God for bearing spiritual, creating a prayerful environment for our ministry may be the number one key to success. Our ministries, our leaders, and our groups must remain in the Vine if they are to bear fruit. One of the best ways to encourage this abiding is to create an environment of prayer.

Our leaders need to know that we're praying for them regularly. Prayer appointments with each small-group leader give our leaders the gift of our time and attention, and most importantly the gift of prayer. Depending on the structure of your ministry, it may be best to have coaches meet individually with leaders for prayer. You, then, should make a point to meet with each coach to pray individually.

Incorporating significant prayer times in our small-group leader training sessions will keep our focus on God's work and will also model the priority of prayer. Though prayer should be incorporated to all training sessions, it's also helpful to offer training on group prayer to help group leaders create prayerful environments in their groups.

Make It a Group Effort

Over time, we'll come into situations where we find ourselves tiring of prayer. Moses ran into this situation interceding for Joshua and the Israelites in the battle with Amalek. Aaron and Hur came alongside Moses, literally holding his arms up in prayer when he became too tired. God responded to their prayer and granted victory in the battle ([Exodus 17:8-13](#)).

We will encounter similar times where even prayer seems too burdensome for us, and we falter in our strength and commitment. At these times, it's important to have Aarons and Hurs around us, holding up our arms in prayer. Our small-group coaches and leaders can and should be part of this support.

One way to involve coaches and leaders in this prayer is to create a prayer newsletter, sharing requests of the ministry as a whole and individual leaders and groups. This enables us to continually cast prayer vision to our leaders while modeling for them vulnerability and dependence on God.

It's been said that "When a man works, man works. When a man prays, God works." God calls us to give ourselves to him in leading our small-group ministries, and that will often involve work of many different kinds. But, just as he called the disciples to pray before he called them to go ([Matthew 9:35-10:8](#)), he calls us to pray for our ministries.

—Andrew Wheeler is the author of [Together in Prayer](#).

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