

**Breakthrough Prayer: Studies for Small Groups**

# **Knowing the God You Pray To**

**Enjoying God Through Prayer**

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## Overview

As you invite people to join this study, it will be extremely helpful to let them know what this study is and what it is not.

First, although this study does lead participants to study the Bible, it is not a Bible study in the way most people think of one. The lessons are highly experiential; if people grasp and use the key ideas in this study, not only will their prayer lives change, but their relationships with God will change as well. So it's important for people to understand that this study is not about looking up answers and learning information—it's about taking risks and investing time to know God relationally.

Another important distinction is that this study is not intended to result in a prayer group that spends a lot of time praying for each other or interceding for issues. Instead, the format encourages people to deepen their *personal* conversations with God.

The primary purpose of this study is to help the participants engage relationally with God through prayer. But you may also discover what other groups have experienced: improved relationships. The study's format and topics lend themselves to sharing lives with each other.

### **The Leader's Role**

Group facilitators for these studies do not need to be expert prayer warriors or spiritual giants in order to be effective. It's much more important that leaders be enthusiastic about growing in their own relationships with God through prayer, be willing to be vulnerable about their spiritual journeys, be committed to preparation and group times, and care about and pray for group members.

### **Group Members' Participation**

Because the goal of this study is to help people experience talking with God in new ways, it is important that potential group members understand they will need to devote time to the study throughout the week before you meet as a group. As a guideline, members should plan to spend about 20 to 30 minutes a day in the study. This time includes reading Scripture, answering questions, and trying out what they learn in prayer practice.

Some group members have found that it's difficult to continue their normal Bible study and devotional times *and* add the homework for this study, so members should be encouraged to consider how and when they will fit the homework into their lives. Because the lessons will lead people to experience God, they could work well for a quiet time each day, if people want to use them that way. The lessons build on each other, so it's also best if participants attend group meetings each week.

### **Number of Weeks**

The study is designed to be completed in six weeks, and most groups will probably use it this way. However, an alternate approach would be to add a week to each lesson and do the study over twelve weeks, allowing for maximum time to let the principles sink in. If you choose to follow a twelve-week model, plan for group

members to complete and discuss the interactive questions the first week. Then the following week, focus on the prayer exercises during homework and group discussion.

### **Group Size**

These studies work with different group sizes. The ideal group size is probably somewhere between five and eight members. But two people can do the studies together and benefit from them. So can larger groups of 20 or so (such as Sunday school classes), provided you break the large group into smaller ones to discuss some of the questions.

### **Meeting Length**

A meeting time of 90 minutes each week is probably a good target. If you want to include prayer time or time for fellowship and refreshments, you should probably aim for two hours. Meeting for less time can work; just keep in mind that you will need to keep the discussion moving and will need to skip portions in order to fit into your allotted time. Obviously, the less group time you have the more important it will be that your group members work through the lessons and prayer responses on their own.

### **Lesson Format**

Each lesson includes the following elements:

***Open Up to God.*** This is a simple prayer participants can pray at the beginning of each lesson to make themselves available to God and to invite Him to do the lesson with them—encouraging them as they seek to know Him better.

***Discover Who God Is.*** This section of questions introduces the key concepts for each lesson and asks group members to interact with Bible passages.

***Respond to God.*** Following the questions, the “Respond to God” section will provide one or more prayer exercises that will help participants talk with God about what they’ve discovered in the thought and study questions.

***Continue the Conversation.*** The lesson closes with suggestions for how to incorporate the week’s prayer activities into everyday life.

### **Preparation**

Keep the following points in mind as you prepare to lead the study in general—and each session in particular.

### **Recruit People to Pray**

Enlist prayer support for yourself and your group from a trusted friend or two. You are engaging in important kingdom work: helping people connect deeply with God and know Him as He truly is. The enemy hates what you are doing and may seek to hinder you. Ask your intercessors to pray for God’s anointing on you as you facilitate this study and also to pray for His protection over you and your group.

### **Pray for Each Group Member**

Pray for each of your group members by name, daily if possible. Pray specifically that God will help them learn, wrestle with, and experience the concepts in each lesson. Let them know you are praying and encourage them to let you know how you can pray, especially regarding what they find challenging about the study. One way to encourage this kind of sharing is to model it by asking them to pray for you in a specific area where you'd like to grow in your prayer life and relationship with God.

### **Prepare Early in the Week**

Work through your week's lesson well in advance of the day your group will meet. This way you can discuss your experiences with any group members you run into during the week. If they call or email you with questions, you'll be able to respond to them intelligently. Your preparation will set a good example as well as give both you and your group confidence.

### **Decide How to Use Group Time**

For each lesson you will find suggestions for your time together. These are only suggestions. Each group will be different, so ask God to show you what lesson elements He wants *your* group to focus on, how to divide your time, how to open and close in prayer, and so on.

### **Customize the Discussion**

Talk to God about what portions of the lesson will be especially important to discuss with your group. You don't have to talk about every question and prayer response. Some weeks you may spend the majority of your time on only one or two portions of the lesson.

The leader's notes for each lesson will give you some guidance to help you draw out the main points of each lesson. It would be a good idea to look at the lesson ahead of time to anticipate which questions and prayer responses your group will likely want to discuss or need help working through. Then pace your discussion so you can be sure to have enough time for those.

Keep in mind that the study was written to lead each participant through a personal experience with God—the questions weren't designed as discussion questions for a group. Because of that distinction, you will want to discuss the *ideas* in the lesson, but feel free to alter how you word or approach individual questions. For example, one question may ask group members to make observations about a scripture passage and a follow-up question might ask them to interpret or apply that passage to their lives. That sequence of questions works well as individuals answer them on their own, but asking both questions in a group discussion can feel tedious or elementary. In the group discussion you might combine the questions and invite group members to share what key points from the passages they wanted to apply to their lives.

## **Leading Group Meetings**

Your role for this study will primarily be facilitator and encourager. You do not need to teach. The lessons will lead the group into discovery in which the Holy Spirit will do the teaching.

### **Provide a Safe Place**

During your group meetings, you will need to provide a safe place for people to be “real,” to share honestly, to ask questions they may never have dared to ask before, and to be accepted no matter where they are on their spiritual journeys. I have three suggestions for how to create this kind of environment.

**First, pray.** Pray for group members on your own time, asking God to help them feel safe and free to share their real thoughts, feelings, and experiences with others, no matter how “unspiritual” those may seem to be. Also pray at the beginning of your sessions, asking God to help your group listen to each other, encourage each other, and accept one another at whatever places they happen to be in their walks with God.

**Second, be an example.** Chances are good you will be wrestling, experimenting, discovering, and learning right along with your group. Do not feel as if you need to be ahead of the game. It’s okay to admit your own questions, struggles, and victories in the process of getting to know God better. The fact that you don’t have it all together will probably encourage your group that they don’t have to have it together either! And that’s a great place to be when it comes to experiencing the goodness of God in new ways—which is exactly what this study aims to do. Whenever possible, identify with the struggles and questions of people in the group. Your vulnerability will help them relax and be comfortable with where they are in their spiritual process.

**Third, allow for diversity.** Recognize that group members will be at different places in their prayer lives. That’s OK. These lessons work fine in groups of mixed spiritual maturity and experience, provided everyone realizes this and commits to contributing to a safe and accepting environment. In your first meeting time, stress the importance of being safe and accepting to all. Remind the ones who are farther ahead to be considerate of and encouraging to those who are newer or struggling.

### **Fostering Discussion**

Encourage everyone to participate, but don’t push anyone. If some members tend to jump in on every question, encourage the less talkative ones by saying something like, “Let’s hear from someone who hasn’t shared yet.” Consider breaking your group into twos and threes on questions where you especially want to encourage participation. If you notice people who hardly ever share, begin praying for them as you’re praying for the group on your own, asking God to help them open up and to give them courage to share.

### **Handling Sensitive Questions**

Notice ahead of time which questions or prayer-response exercises your group may perceive as especially personal. This does not mean you should avoid discussing them. However, try to be extra sensitive about how you bring up these questions and exercises. Allow group members a gracious way to opt out if they are not

comfortable sharing. Alternatively, break your group into smaller groups of twos or threes. Many people feel freer to share in small groups than in larger ones. And as rapport and trust grows in your group, many will become more open in sharing even in the larger group.

### **If Deep Needs Arise**

It's possible that some of your group members will become aware of wounds, longings, or needs as they participate in these studies. This is a good thing. It means God is working in deep places of the heart as people take the risk of sharing themselves honestly with Him. If someone shares a deep need during your group time, send up a quick silent prayer to God asking Him what to do. Ordinarily you will want to arrange for a time to meet with the person after your group meeting (perhaps another trusted, mature group member can join you). Encourage the person to meet with God and pour out his or her heart to God and then to listen for God's loving, healing response.

### **Encouraging Participation**

This study is designed to provide practical, hands-on opportunities for people to grow deeper in their relationships with God through prayer. Your group will get the most out of the study if they work through each lesson on their own and come to the group time prepared to share what they have learned and experienced and where they may be struggling.

Since the object of this study is not to learn *about* prayer but actually to pray, the prayer responses and practices are *essential*. If your group only completes and talks about the questions but does not practice prayer, you will miss the main objective of the study. You learn to pray by *praying*.

You can encourage full participation in several ways.

- Before the first class begins, when recruiting group members, state your expectation that members will invest time in the study on their own.
- Model faithful and thorough preparation
- As you talk with participants between group meetings, tell them what you are learning.
- In group time, be honest and vulnerable as you share your own experiences and insights.
- Consider yourself an enthusiastic fellow learner and facilitator rather a teacher.
- Pray that God will encourage your group about what they are learning and experiencing so their enthusiasm is contagious to other members.

I realize not everyone can or will invest time on their own every week. If that is true of your group, you can still have a meaningful group time. Here are some suggestions to choose from that can help you get the most out of this course even if group members' outside participation is limited.

- Assign a small portion of the upcoming session. Ask God to identify a lesson portion that would be especially appropriate for your group (a section that would

take 15 minutes of preparation or less would be a good goal). Then during your group meeting, assign this section for the next week. Perhaps group members can do this small chunk even if they cannot find time for the entire lesson. And perhaps the portion you assign will stimulate curiosity and get people to go further. But even if it doesn't, at least they will have done that one section.

- Include individual time with God in your group meetings. By discussing fewer questions, you can save time to allow people to get alone with God for one or two of the more personal question or one of the prayer responses.
- Do part of the lesson during group time. Break your group into smaller groups (twos or threes) and divide some of the questions among them. Ask them to report their findings back to the big group. This way you can cover more territory in less time.
- Extend your meeting length. Some groups are happy to meet for two hours—or more. Even if participants haven't done preparation ahead of time, a longer meeting time will allow you to cover most of the lesson together.

## **Lesson 1**

### **Knowing God**

As you pray for your group during the week, keep in mind the big idea for this lesson:

Knowing God more fully and accurately will greatly expand and enrich the ways we pray, relate to, and enjoy Him.

Ask God to give your group deep thirst to know Him more and more.

### **Group Meeting**

On the day of your first meeting, review the “Leading Group Meetings” section at the front of this leader’s guide to refresh your memory about some of the goals and strategies of leading this study.

You’ll want to show up for the study ten minutes or so before it is scheduled to begin to make sure your room is set up, to pray and prepare yourself, and to welcome group members as they arrive.

Aim to begin on time because this study will probably require every minute of your time together.

### **Set the Tone for the Study**

Begin by welcoming everyone, and facilitating brief introductions. Share something short and personal about yourself with the group to help them get to know you—for instance, you might want to mention why you want to participate in this study or why you think it will be beneficial.

Make a simple transition such as, “Ready to get started?” and ask everyone if they had a chance to read the “How to Get the Most from This Study” section in their study books. Review it together, or, if many of your group members have not read it, take a few minutes to read it together. Ask if there are any questions.

If group members express concern about doing the homework, look for ways to encourage them. Remind them that the study assignments could substitute for a daily devotional time. Also let them know that there is no rigid requirement for how to complete the lesson. If it works better to do the work in two or three days instead of seven, that’s fine. Assure them that even though the homework is important, if they miss doing some on any given week, it’s okay. No one will scold them for it, and they can just share the parts they were able to do. Also reassure them that you are asking God to show them creative ways to find time to work on the study and talk to Him.

Tell the group how important it is to you that everyone enjoy the study, feel safe sharing, and grow in their relationships with God through prayer. Discuss the points from the “Leading Group Meetings” section about encouraging one another, being vulnerable, and creating a safe environment for everyone. Tell them you are

learning right along with them. Also tell them that you will be praying for them during the week and invite them to share any prayer concerns with you.

Let everyone know that you will not always discuss every question in the lesson. Rather, you will try to cover the main *ideas* of the lesson and also give time to discuss their prayer experiences.

Ask if there are any more questions. If not, begin with prayer and get started.

### **Opening Prayer**

Thank God for the opportunity to get to know Him better through deep relationship with Him. Ask Him to help your group get to know each other better, too, as they listen to each other, encourage each other, and accept one another at whatever place they find themselves in their walks with God. Invite the Holy Spirit to be present in your discussions.

### **Introduction**

Ask your group if they have any comments or questions about the format, goals, or approach of this study. As they did the first lesson, did they notice a difference between “typical Bible study mode” and creative, genuine engagement with God? Affirm again that this study is not about “getting the right answer”; instead, it is about getting to know God, being honest with Him, and learning to interact with Him in new ways. Everyone’s answers will be different—and that’s good!

**Question 1.** Ask people to share some of their answers to these prompts, as it will help you get to know each other at the start of the study. But plan how much time to spend here—talking about these could consume the bulk of your first meeting.

**Cynthia’s story.** Interact about this story as a group. Can you relate? Has there ever been a time when you felt known in only one way? In her story, Cynthia talks about longing for others to take time to really know and understand her. Obviously being known more fully would have benefited *her*. But relationships are two-way. What benefits do others miss out on when they don’t get to know us?

**Question 2.** What was it like to try to answer these questions for God? What did group members learn about God or themselves through this exercise?

### **Discover Who God Is**

**Question 4.** Some people debate about whether God can really be known. If someone in your group brings up this objection, here is a little background you can draw on—but don’t feel like you need to raise this point if it’s not an issue for your group.

Because God is infinite and human beings are finite, some theologians suggest that God is “unknowable.” At the risk of oversimplifying the question, it seems more accurate to say that while certain things about God are mysterious and we’ll never fully comprehend Him, we can *know* Him. How can we be sure about that? His Word *says* He wants us to know Him. If someone struggles with this, suggest they spend more time with the Jeremiah passages.

**Questions 5 - 8.** Invite members to share about their experiences and discoveries. Some group members may have written down a very personal prayer topic, one that they are hesitant to share with the group. If discussion lags because all or many of your group members would rather not share about their prayer topics, suggest a generic prayer (“Your child is facing a tough test in an upcoming class” “Our missionaries are returning home after two hard years on the field”) and ask how the prayer prompts in question 7 would alter those prayers.

### **Respond to God**

**Prayer Response 1.** Invite members to share their experiences, keeping in mind that this may have been a very personal experience for many of them. Do not pressure anyone to share. If no one wants to share, or if only one or two people do, take a step back and ask a general question like, “How did this exercise go for you? What went well? What was difficult? Did you discover anything about yourself or God as you tried this prayer experiment?”

*Note: If some group members are new to listening to God, remind them to read Appendix A for help getting started. If the majority of your group needs this introduction, you may want to go over the Appendix during your time together.*

**Prayer Response 2.** Invite members to share what facets of God they discovered. How did these discoveries change the way they prayed and experienced God?

### **Preview the Coming Lessons**

It may help your group if you explain to them that Lesson 1 set the foundation for the rest of the study. For the rest of the study, each lesson will cover one facet of God in depth. Next week they will spend the entire time getting to know God as their Shepherd.

### **Closing Prayer**

Focus on thanksgiving and praise for the truths God is revealing about Himself, and for how the group is getting to know Him better. If a member talked about a deep need during your discussion, pray about that need. Close your prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to encourage the group in the week ahead as they get to know God as Shepherd.

## **Lesson 2**

### **Our Good Shepherd**

As you pray for your group during the week, keep in mind the big idea for this lesson:

The Good Shepherd cares for His sheep, unconditionally. Knowing this about Him invites us to interact with Him about our needs and brokenness, as well as those of others.

Ask God to reveal Himself to each member in these unconditionally loving ways and to open their hearts to respond to His care.

### **Group Meeting**

Point out the “rhythm” of the lesson (open up to God, discover who God is, respond to God) and encourage group members to use this same rhythm each day as they work through the lesson. They can begin using the prayer-starter summaries (found at the end of the lesson) as soon as they’d like during the week to help them respond to God.

#### **Opening Prayer**

Thank God for the opportunity to get to know Him as the Shepherd of your souls. Ask Him to help your group enjoy Him and each other as they share their discoveries about Him as Good Shepherd. Invite the Holy Spirit to be present in your discussions and to help you as a group to create a safe place for people to share their thoughts and hearts with one another.

#### **Discover Who God Is**

Ask group members to talk about their previous Bible study experiences. Did they learn *about* God or engage *with* Him? If people say they engaged *with* Him, ask them to share what worked and didn’t. How did they keep the Bible study relational and not just about acquiring information?

**Question 2.** Invite the group to share their answers.

**Question 3.** The answer to this question is “nothing.” Ask if anyone had a reaction to their realization that the shepherd does everything for the sheep and they do nothing for the shepherd. Invite them to share and discuss, if they’d like.

**Question 4.** Invite members to share their answers. Keep in mind that answering honestly may require a degree of trust and vulnerability. If people seem reluctant to share, consider giving your own response first—especially if you more typically think of God as Lord and Master.

**Question 5.** Invite people to share their discoveries. Be enthusiastic, appreciative and affirming of their creative answers—praise outside-of-the-Bible-study-box responding and encourage the group to feel free in expressing themselves and enjoying these kinds of exercises. Realize, however, that some folks will say “I’m just not creative” and may struggle with this exercise. Encourage them that the main idea is just to engage their hearts along with their minds, and if they want to do that through ordinary words, that’s okay. They don’t have to be poets or artists!

**Question 6.** Invite your group to share their answers. Were they surprised that God makes a point to talk about bad shepherding? Why do they think He did this?

**Question 7.** Invite group members to share their responses.

**Question 8.** This question may be too personal for some folks, so be sensitive. If you feel free to share your own answers, others may feel more free to share as well. If no one wants to share, don’t push. Just acknowledge that it’s personal and that’s okay and move on.

**Cynthia’s Story.** Does anyone want to comment on Cynthia’s story? Did anyone identify with parts of what she said? Which parts?

### **Respond to God**

If they feel free to do so, invite members to share their experiences with these prayer exercises. They’re personal, though, so don’t pressure. If no one wants to share, just ask general questions such as, “How did it go for you? Were you able to connect with God as Shepherd? What was that like?”

*Note: Prayer Response 2 is a simplified introduction to listening and healing prayer. (For an excellent resource on this subject, see [A Guide for Listening and Inner Healing Prayer: Meeting God in the Broken Places](#) by Rusty Rustenbach, [www.navpress.com](http://www.navpress.com))*

### **Continue the Conversation**

Ask group members how their prayer times with the Shepherd went. How was their praying different when they talked to God according to this aspect of His personality compared with how they ordinarily pray? What was the same? What was different? Can they see themselves relating to God this way in the future?

### **Closing Prayer**

How was your group most affected by this study? By the Shepherd’s tender care? His desire to serve His sheep unconditionally? His longing to be the *Good Shepherd* and heal any bad shepherding they’ve received?

Center your prayer around these gifts, thanking God for all He is for you and your group and for all He wants to be. Ask Him to help you and your group receive, respond to, and be changed by His shepherding. Close your prayer by asking the

Holy Spirit to encourage the group in the coming week as they get to know God as Creator.

## **Lesson 3**

### **Our Creator**

As you pray for your group during the week, keep in mind the big idea for this lesson:

God is a loving, personally involved Creator who has thoughts, feelings, and plans for His creation. Ask God to help each of your group members relate to Him in new ways because of what He reveals to them about Himself as their Creator.

### **Group Meeting**

#### **Opening Prayer**

Thank God for the opportunity to get to know Him as your loving and personally involved Creator. Ask Him to help your group appreciate the beauty and wonder of His creation, especially as they think about how He created them and other members of your group. Invite the Holy Spirit to show your group where each of you may have had incomplete or inaccurate views of God so that you can know Him, relate to Him, and enjoy Him as He truly is.

#### **Review**

Before you discuss this lesson, ask your group to share stories of how these lessons are shaping the way they relate to God. How is prayer changing or becoming more engaging for them? Does anyone have a story of talking to God as Shepherd they'd like to share? Remind your group that these lessons are intended to give them new ways of connecting with God relationally and conversationally.

#### **Discover Who God Is and Respond to God**

You may wish to walk through the questions and prayer responses in the order that your group did them. As an alternative, instead of going over each question, use the following format to invite discussion about the main points in this lesson. If time remains, you can visit individual questions.

**Questions 2 and 3.** What new thoughts or feelings came to you as you thought about God's *feelings* about His creation? How does the fact that God feels proud of, protective of, concerned about, pleased with, generous toward what He has made—especially you!—make you respond or want to respond?

**Prayer Responses 1 and 2.** Invite your group to share how these went. Which one did they choose and why? Do they feel any differently about God or themselves as a result of praying this way?

**Question 6 and Prayer Response 3.** Why is it sometimes difficult to yield to the Potter's hands as He forms you? What is God showing you about Himself in this lesson that could help you trust His making and remaking of you more? How might knowing God in these new ways affect the way you talk to Him?

**Question 7 and Prayer Response 4.** Which takes more creative genius: Creating something fresh or re-creating something that's been marred? How does knowing God as both your Maker and ReMaker affect your outlook on your past? Your present? Your future? How might it affect the way you talk with Him?

### **Continue the Conversation**

You may find that some group members didn't make it to the "Continuing the Conversation" section (there was a lot of content!). If they did try it, ask them how it went. If they didn't, go over the "Misconceptions of God as Creator" sidebar now. Invite people to share about any misperceptions they have had and how this lesson is helping to correct them.

### **Closing Prayer**

How was your group most affected by this study? By the Creator's feelings toward them? His desire for continued involvement in the shaping of their lives? His ability and desire to remake what has been marred or broken?

You may want to have a group prayer time using the prayer starters summary.

Or, center your prayer around the aspects of our Creator God that seemed most meaningful to your group. Ask Him to increase your group's awareness of His loving attention and His desire to be involved in shaping and reshaping their lives. Ask Him to give them courage to lift brokenness to Him to fix. Close your prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to encourage the group in the coming week as they get to know God as Savior.

## **Lesson 4**

### **Our Mighty-to-Save God**

#### **Heads-Up About Lesson 6**

Lesson 6 is going to be somewhat of a departure from the style of lesson you've been doing as you've studied God's roles. One of the purposes of this study is to equip your group to engage with God on their own after the study is done. Therefore, in Lesson 6, group members will be doing their own study of an aspect of God's character—from scratch—so they gain confidence in how to discover God and relate with God on their own.

In Lesson 6, I'll take them "behind the scenes" and walk them through the same Bible study process I've followed as I've studied these roles of God. I will also help them formulate their own prayer responses and ask them to write their own summary of prayer prompts.

I'm letting you know this now for a couple of reasons. First, you may want to plant seeds in your group to help prepare them for what is coming. For example, you could comment "Wouldn't it be great to be able to keep discovering God like this?" "Would you like to be able to do this kind of study for yourself, like Cynthia has?" or "What other aspects of God would you like to study?"

Second, it may help you lead Lesson 6 if you begin working your way through it now. That way you can be ahead of the game when you explain this lesson to your group. And definitely be praying about Lesson 6. If your group really gets on board with it, they will be developing a skill that will enable them to continue getting to know God more deeply and intimately for the rest of their lives.



As you pray for your group during the week, keep in mind the big idea for this lesson:

God longs for us to ask Him for help. We can come to Him at any time with any need we'll ever have, knowing He genuinely wants to save us.

Ask God to help each of your group members relate to Him in new ways because of what He reveals to them about Himself as their Savior.

### **Group Meeting**

#### **Opening Prayer**

Thank God for the opportunity to get to know Him as the God who longs to be gracious to you, who is mighty to save. Ask Him to help your group recognize the many opportunities they have to call on Him for "everyday salvation." Invite the

Holy Spirit to show your group where each of you may have had incomplete or inaccurate views of your Savior so you can know Him, relate to Him, and enjoy Him as He truly is.

### **Review**

Before you get into this week's lesson, ask your group to share stories of how these lessons are changing the way they relate to God. How is prayer deepening and becoming more engaging? Does anyone have a story of talking to God as Shepherd or Creator they'd like to share? Remind your group that these lessons are intended to give them new ways of connecting with God relationally and conversationally.

### **Optional: Contemplative Bible Reading – Psalm 40**

As an alternative to jumping right into group discussion, you might like to open with a contemplative reading of Psalm 40:1-4, 10-17. (If you choose this option, you will need to limit the number of questions you discuss, so keep that in mind.)

This style of reading might be somewhat different for your group members. The goal is not to read the passage as a preface to entering into a Bible study discussion. Instead, you're encountering a prayer from a highly relational man who knew God well. Enter into the prayer with him, soak in it, and let it affect you. Plan on taking about 20 minutes for the entire exercise. Here's how you could do it.

**Reading 1.** Ask someone to read the passage aloud slowly, with expression.

- After the reading, ask the group what the passage is about. Talk about the setting and review basic facts about the content.

**Reading 2.** Choose another person to read the passage aloud again, perhaps in a different translation of the Bible. Before this person reads, ask the group to pay attention to the feelings that are being expressed by the psalmist.

- Ask the group what emotions they noticed being expressed.

**Reading 3.** Ask for a third person to read the passage aloud, perhaps from a different translation. In this final reading, ask the group to listen for God's part and the psalmist's part in rescuing from difficulty.

- Ask the group to share what they heard.
- Close in a brief prayer, asking God to help your group learn to know Him and relate to Him as the psalmist did in this passage.

### **Discover Who God Is**

**Question 2 and sidebar.** Which kinds of salvation have you asked God for in the past? Which ones haven't you asked Him for? Why haven't you? Has this lesson challenged you or encouraged you to dial His 911 more often?

**Question 3.** Invite the group to share their responses. How did doing this question change the way you think about and relate to God?

**Cynthia's thoughts.** Did you connect with Cynthia's thoughts under "When God Doesn't Seem to be Saving"? If so, how? What do you think about her statement that

even though God may seem unresponsive about the area where she wants saving, He wasn't unresponsive to her in general? Can anyone share a time when God didn't seem to provide the immediate rescue you asked for but still loved and cared for you in the middle of your ongoing trial? (If no one in your group has a story, ask the group to speculate about how it might look or feel to have God care for you even though He isn't yet rescuing you from your circumstances.)

**Question 4c.** Think about how a mom responds when her child is feeling upset, hurt, or afraid. What is the first thing she is likely to do—fix the problem? Probably not. She'll probably give that child a hug and some comfort. Can you see how God might also want to do this for us?

**Question 5.** How can we "make room for God to save" (If you did the Psalm 40 contemplative reading, recall what the Psalmist did there.) Possible answers include

- don't take matters into our own hands
- admit our need
- ask Him
- trust and actually *expect* Him to answer
- wait for Him if the answer doesn't come right away
- don't let the enemy tell us that God doesn't want to, won't, or can't save us

Which of these are easy for you? Hard? How can we encourage one another to invite God's salvation more often?

### **Respond to God**

**Prayer Response 3.** Read through the common misconceptions people have about God as Savior. Share one or more you have had and invite your group to share theirs. How has this study helped to give a more complete and accurate view of God? How will that help you to depend on Him for salvation more in days to come?

**Additional prayer responses.** Invite your group to share their experience with one of the other prayer response exercises. Keep in mind that some of these prayers may be very personal, so don't push. Be prepared to lead with your own example if needed.

### **Continue the Conversation**

Invite discussion about the "Continue the Conversation" suggestions. Are your group members trying these? Which sections of prayer starters are most helpful? How are their prayers changing as a result of trying these new ways of praying?

### **Closing Prayer**

How was your group most affected by this study? By God's desire and longing to save in every area of their lives? His concern for them even when His answers seem to be slow in coming? The challenge of making room for His salvation?

Center your prayer around the aspects of God that seemed most meaningful to the members of your group. Ask Him to increase your group's awareness of His longing to show them mercy and His desire to be involved in every aspect of their live. Ask Him to give them courage to call out for His help, even when they feel like they should be able to handle things themselves. Close your prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to encourage the group in the coming week as they get to know God as King.

## Lesson 5 Our King

### Reminder about Lesson 6

Remember that Lesson 6 is going to be different from what you have been doing. It will be a do-it-yourself lesson that gives you and your group the skills to work through a study like this on your own.

Please do whatever you can to work ahead a bit in your homework. This will put you in a far better position to help your group next week if questions arise. And be sure to pray for them to have time and interest and willingness to sink into Lesson 6 and get everything out of it that God has for them.

If you have group members who are new to Bible study, you might offer a time during the week when they can get together and work through a portion of Lesson 6 together.

Also, as you plan how to use your group time this week, reserve some time at the end to explain next week's lesson.



As you pray for your group during the week, keep in mind the big idea for this lesson:

Our God is King of the universe. He is also our Abba-Father and has welcomed us into His intimate family. He is concerned about the things that concern us and offers all of who He is—His generosity, fairness, kindness, wisdom, righteousness, influence, and power—to care for what matters to us and to bring His kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. This understanding brings great life and potential to our intercession.

Ask God to help each of your group members to relate to Him in new ways as He reveals Himself to them as their Father-King.

### Group Meeting

#### Opening Prayer

Thank God for the opportunity to get to know Him as a benevolent, supremely powerful, and loving King who longs to intervene in your world and bring His kingdom to earth. Ask Him to help your group appreciate the closeness of their relationship with Him as His sons and daughters. Invite the Holy Spirit to show your group where each of you may have had incomplete or inaccurate views of your King so you can know Him, relate to Him, and enjoy Him as He truly is.

#### Review

Before you discuss this week's lesson, ask your group to share stories of how these lessons are changing the way they relate to God. How is prayer changing? Does anyone have a story of talking to God as Savior, Shepherd, or Creator they'd like to share? Remind your group that these lessons are intended to give them new ways of connecting with God relationally and conversationally.

### **Discover Who God Is**

***Cynthia's story about authority.*** Did you identify with Cynthia's difficulty in relating to God as a supreme ruler? Talk about your own view of ultimate authority and how that view may have (even subconsciously) affected your ability to relate to God as King.

***Questions 2, 4, and 6.*** These are mostly information-gathering questions, so move quickly through them, leaving yourself plenty of time to discuss your group's responses to questions 3, 5, and 7.

***Questions 3, 5, and 7.*** Invite your group to share and interact with one another about what they have written.

***Cynthia's story about praying to the King.*** Ask your group if they identify with Cynthia's way of intercession—praying for others with lists—before she made her discoveries about her Father-King. How has praying to God relationally changed group members' intercession this week? (Or if they haven't had time to try it yet, how do they think it *might* change their future intercession?) It might help if you share your perspectives and experiences first.

### **Respond to God**

Rather than systematically talking through each of the prayer responses, invite your group to share their experiences with the exercise that was most meaningful. Keep in mind that some of these may be very personal, so don't push. Be prepared to lead with your own example.

***Prayer Response 1.*** Share with your group any misperceptions of God the King you may have had and tell how they have affected your praying and relating to Him. Then invite your group to share theirs. How will a more accurate view of God enhance your relationships and conversations with Him?

### **Continue the Conversation**

Invite discussion about "Continue the Conversation." Are your group members trying these prayer starters? Which sections of prayer prompts are most helpful? How are their prayers changing as a result of trying these new ways of praying?

### **Preview Next Week**

Give your group a preview of Lesson 6. Explain that one of the goals of this study has been to inspire them to continue discovering God's character on their own—long after the study is done. Because of that, the format for Lesson 6 will be a bit

different. While they will still be studying of an aspect of God's character, this time Cynthia is going to walk them through the basic study steps she's been using as she studied each God's roles. By applying those same steps, they'll learn how to do one of these studies on their own. Then, they can apply those same steps to any other role of God.

Add that Cynthia hopes that, by showing them how to this study, they'll go on to study many more aspects of who God is, long after this group time is finished.

Explain that if they would like some additional explanation of how to study an aspect of who God is, they can turn to Appendix B (make sure to let your group know that whether they read it is up to them; it's there if they need it, but if they don't want or need it, that's perfectly time).

If you've done some of Lesson 6 already, share positively from your own experience.

If possible, offer to meet with group members who would like to work through parts of the lesson together.

### **Closing Prayer**

How was your group most affected by this study? By God's benevolent, supremely loving, and powerful governing? By His including them in His family and giving them special privileges of access and influence with Him? By His desire and right to rule in their lives and what that means for them and their worlds?

Center your prayer around the aspects of God that seemed most meaningful to the members of your group. Ask Him to increase your group's awareness of His goodness and power, and of His desire to talk with them about the people and issues that concern them. Ask Him to help you grasp the privilege of intercession He has given you as His sons and daughters, along with the right and desire He has to be King in your lives.

Close your prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to encourage the group in the coming week as they learn a discovery process that will equip them to keep discovering new things about God for the rest of their lives.

**Lesson Six**  
**Our Advocate**  
*Cultivating the Lifelong Joy of Discovering God*

As you pray for your group during the week, ask God to encourage them as they practice skills that will equip them to continue getting to know and relate to God for the rest of their lives. This week may prove especially challenging for some, so ask God to provide motivation and hunger to keep going, and help and rescue for when they get stuck. Ask Him to make it *fun* for them. And, ask Him to give them the joy of discovering Him as their Advocate who loves to serve as their champion and go-between.

**Group Meeting**

This lesson was obviously quite different from the others in this study. Allow your group an opportunity to share their joys of discovery while also helping them through any tough spots they may have encountered. (If no one—or only one person—did the lesson, don't panic. If very few people did the lesson or didn't complete it, turn it into a group exercise and do it together. You may even find it's more fun doing it together.)

Pace yourself for this part of your group meeting, though, or it will take over your time together. Make sure to leave 15 or 20 minutes at the end for a closing discussion and prayer about how God has used the entire study in their lives.

**Opening Prayer**

Praise God for His infinite goodness, that we can never know Him completely because He's so big and beyond our finite imaginations. At the same time, praise Him because He *wants* to be known and because we can go on enjoying new things about Him throughout our lives. Ask Him to help you to encourage one another as you explore skills that will enable you to continue this joyful pursuit on your own in days to come.

**Review**

Ordinarily we review at the beginning of the lesson, but since this is our last week, we'll hold off until the closing discussion at the end of this lesson.

**Discover Who God Is**

Start by asking your group how doing this part of the lesson went for them. Leave this question open-ended. If anyone shares that parts were difficult or they got stuck, take some time to process through those spots with them.

Go to the questions where people got stuck or were especially challenged and let them share what was difficult for them. Affirm them for trying and encourage them about any attempts they made. Refer them to the appropriate section in Appendix B in case they didn't notice it. Ask others how they completed that part of the study. But make sure the tone of the sharing is humble and encouraging. Be careful not to let the person who had difficulty feel inadequate or patronized.

- Ask the group what thoughts they uncovered that were especially meaningful, encouraging, satisfying, or helpful. If they mention a specific section (for example, if they really enjoyed thinking about a human counterpart to a particular aspect of God) go to that section and invite others to share their responses, too. Keep the conversation going by asking questions such as, “Why did you enjoy that so much?” and “How did that help you?”

Be prepared to share the parts you enjoyed most, if people are slow to volunteer their thoughts.

- Ask the group to share their thoughts and feelings about their discoveries of God as their Advocate. Be prepared to lead the way with your own. Emphasize your heart and how this will affect the way you *relate* with God (rather than just knowing something new about Him).

### **Respond to God**

- Again, ask the group how this part of the lesson went. If they mention difficulties, invite others to share helpful input. Assure them that everyone is new to this and it’s not surprising that it was a bit tough in places. Encourage them that if they got *anything* at all, they were off to a good start.

- Invite your group to share the prayer responses they chose and perhaps ask them why they chose them. Ask members to share how their conversations with God went. How do they see God differently now? How will this new understanding affect the way they pray in the future?

### **Continue the Conversation**

- One last time, ask the group how putting together their own prayer-starter summaries went for them. As before, walk them through any tough spots. It’s very possible not many people got to this part. If that’s true and if you have enough time (still saving time for the closing discussion) work through some of it as a group.

- Invite your group to share how they used their prayer summaries this week. If responses are sparing, ask them how they used it in previous weeks, or how they could see them using it in the future.

### **Closing Discussion and Prayer**

It’s time to take a step back and review this entire study. Here are some questions to invite discussion:

- What aspect of God was most meaningful to you? Why?
- How has your prayer life changed as a result of this study?

- How have your perceptions of God changed as a result of what you learned about God in these past six weeks?
- What aspect of God would you like to explore next?
- How can we pray for each other as we continue this lifelong adventure of getting to know God better and better?

Close your time in prayer, inviting as many in the group to pray as want to. Don't push or pressure. When everyone is finished, pray a closing prayer of blessing, praying any requests that haven't already been prayed, thanking God for all He's given and shown, and asking Him to continue the good work that He has started in each of you.



**Option:** Consider meeting with your group from time to time (perhaps once a month) to continue exploring new aspects of God and deepening your prayer conversations with them. You could use the suggestions they came up with at the end of the lesson for new aspects of God they'd like to study more, and then give them as group assignments for the month. Imagine the enjoyment you could have if your group continued this journey into the heart of God together!