



KYLE DIROBERTS

THE  
SECRET  
TO  
PRAYER

31 DAYS TO A MORE INTIMATE  
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

GUIDE FOR GROUP CONVERSATION  
BY BRYAN MCANALLY

# THE SECRET TO PRAYER

## A GUIDE FOR GROUP CONVERSATION

### INTRODUCTION

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#### **Lets Talk About: The Illness of Prayer**

- 1 Share a time where you met someone who left you awe-struck or speechless. What were some of the thoughts going through your mind at the time? What were you feeling? What do you wish you could have said? Why do you think being in that person's presence affected you the way it did?
- 2 How do you define or explain prayer to someone else? Does your explanation match up with your own experiences of praying? If not, what is it about prayer that you find frustrating or difficult?
- 3 Humility is described more as an attitude that produces actions than merely the actions (or even words) themselves. How humble would the person who knows you best (and not necessarily the person who likes you the most) rate you, in terms of humility? What do you think are things you struggle with regarding having a humble heart?
- 4 What do you hope to accomplish through reading this book? How would you like to see your prayer experience change?

### PART ONE: THEO-TALK

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#### **Lets Talk About 1: Swing Your Swing**

- 1 What are some words, phrases, or sayings—or even ways of saying things—that are common to you or unique to you?
- 2 How would you describe your manner of speaking; simple, plain-spoken, eloquent, verbose, scatter-brained, detail-oriented, passionate (or some other description)?
- 3 Have you ever felt that how you talk was inadequate for prayer? If so, in what ways?
- 4 How does it make you feel to know that God made you to communicate the way you do, but that he's not troubled by how you communicate, nor does he expect or need you to communicate any better or any differently than exactly how you communicate, to pray well?

#### **Lets Talk About 2: Naked**

- 1 We were created for relationship; specifically, for equal relationship expressed through relational intimacy. Who is the person with whom you'd say you experience this type of relationship?
- 2 In what ways do you experience relational intimacy as oneness with the other person?
- 3 How do you think relational intimacy with another person reflects the perfect intimacy of the triune God?
- 4 How is your life better because of the relational intimacy you enjoy?



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### **Lets Talk About 3: Clothed**

- 1 How do you define or describe sin? Why do you think sin is a problem to God?
- 2 Genesis 3:6-10 explains the first sin, which caused the spiritual earthquake that affected the rest of human history. How does your own sin negatively affect your relationship with God? With the people that matter the most to you?
- 3 How have you, like Adam and Eve, tried to hide from God after sinning? How have you tried to cover yourself? Why do you think you've tried to do these things?
- 4 Why do you think it is important to know that God went to the effort of effectively covering Adam and Eve, even though they had attempted to cover themselves earlier (as a result of their own sin)? What does this tell you about God's grace and how he treats you as a result of your own sin (and your own attempts to cover yourself)?

### **Lets Talk About 4: Awkward**

- 1 Share a time where you had an awkward-but-necessary conversation. Why was it necessary? What made it awkward? What came out of it?
- 2 When does prayer feel the most awkward for you? Is it when it's most necessary? In what ways do you think your imperfect human nature experiences the awkwardness in constantly needing to pray?
- 3 How do you think your prayer might be less meaningful or important to you if it were no different than how you talked with someone just as flawed and imperfect as yourself?
- 4 How does remembering God's perfection, goodness, holiness, and other infinitely incredible attributes help shape your humility in approaching him in prayer?

### **Lets Talk About 5: Faith**

- 1 How do you describe your prayer relationship with God? How do you hear from God? How do your responses to these first two questions differ from others in the group?
- 2 In what ways have you experienced having a prayer conversation with God be one-direction? How has it been two-direction?
- 3 What does God's revelation mean to you? In what ways have you experienced God's revelation?
- 4 What has your experience been like in waiting on God for his revelation? How would you characterize your thoughts and feelings while waiting on God? How have those thoughts or feelings changed or developed once God has revealed?
- 5 How much do you contemplate or reflect on what you perceive that God has revealed? A little? A lot? Too little? Too much? What do you think is a good way to measure how you're reflecting on these matters?

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### **Lets Talk About 6: Everything**

- 1 Define what God's omniscience means to you. What do you think the implications are that God knows literally everything about you?
- 2 What do you think is the relationship between humility and neediness?
- 3 If you're being honest, what are some things that you're willing to admit that you know that God knows you need?
- 4 Why do you think there may be a value of humility expressed through prayer in coming to God and voicing your needs to him (when he's already perfectly aware of every need that you'll ever have for the scope of your entire life)?

### **Lets Talk About 7: Groanings**

- 1 Share a time where you have hurt so deeply or been so troubled you didn't have words to articulate your thoughts, feelings, and emotions. What was happening?
- 2 How does it make you feel to know that in those deeply challenging times, the Holy Spirit initiates spiritual conversations with the Father, without using words?
- 3 What do you see is your role, your part to be in those times? What do you think is important for you to understand about your responsibilities when those times happen?
- 4 What are some of your thoughts when you consider that God is able to have a perfect relational conversation amongst his triune personhood, in the context of your deepest unarticulated needs, and he invites you to actively participate in it by simply being present in the humble attitude of quiet (even silent) prayer?

### **Lets Talk About 8: Thomas the Train Undies**

- 1 Share how different aspects of your spiritual growth have been a learning process or where you've made some mistakes along the way (maybe with your prayer life, or your Bible reading, or your small group involvement, or your church worship attendance/participation, or serving). What have you learned through the process of growing or even making mistakes?
- 2 What are some wrong thoughts that you've had corrected along the way of these journeys?
- 3 Who are some people that God has used in these experiences to help you? In what ways have they helped you?
- 4 How can your mistakes be helpful to the people you meet coming behind you?

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### PART II: PRAYERS OF HUMBLE KINGS

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#### **Lets Talk About 9: Jehosha-who?**

- 1 What are circumstances that strike fear in you? What are some of your first reactions or responses when you are afraid? Do you tend to go to God as a first step or a last resort? Why do you think this is your habit?
- 2 What do you think is significant or powerful about Jehoshaphat's prayer, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you" (2 Chronicles 20:12)? What does it mean for you to "have your eyes on the Lord" in circumstances that are overwhelming or make you fearful?
- 3 Do you believe that God's answer to Jehoshaphat ("Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's" [2 Chronicles 20:15]) is a promise you can count on, as well? Why or why not?
- 4 What does it look like in practical terms to believe that God is fighting the battles that fill you with fear? How does it help you to not be afraid or be dismayed?

#### **Lets Talk About 10: The "Chronicler"**

- 1 How do you define or describe wisdom? What do you think is the relationship between wisdom and humility?
- 2 Who is the wisest person you personally know? In what ways do you see humility expressed in their wisdom?
- 3 Why do you think God blessed Solomon with great wealth, authority, and power after giving him wisdom? In what ways have you noticed other people mismanage wealth, authority, or power by being unwise (or have you done so yourself)?
- 4 In what way do you see Solomon's humble attitude protecting him from the corrosive potential of the subsequent perks of wealth, authority, and power? How can these perks negatively affect your own humble attitude over time, if left unchecked? What can help protect you against those negative possibilities?

#### **Lets Talk About 11: If...Then**

- 1 "If...Then" explains conditions and consequences; specifically here, the (inevitable) conditions of sins and the related consequences. What are some of the predictable consequences of your own sin that you have observed? How have those consequences affected your understanding of God? Of yourself? Of other people? Of your relationship with God and/or with those other people?
- 2 In what ways does pride cloud your thinking about your sin and its consequences? In what ways have you seen humility either confront or correct the "cloudy thinking" leading to pride and sin?
- 3 Why do you think it's important to confess your sin to God, when he already knows everything about you? How is this an expression of humility? When you agree with what God says about both you and your sin, how do you think that positions you to receive God's blessing?
- 4 How have you seen God faithfully fulfill the "Then" promises connected to the "If" conditions of your repentance? How have you seen God forgive you, or heal broken relationships or restore what seemed irreparable? What does it mean to you to be forgiven by God? How does it make you feel to be forgiven by God?

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### **Lets Talk About 12: Pretense**

- 1 Have you ever “faked it?” What were the circumstances? What was your motivation or your rationale for doing so? Were you convincing? Were you found out?
- 2 How do you feel when you discover that someone else is being pretentious, inauthentic, or disingenuous? Why do you think we try to behave that way toward God at times?
- 3 What does it mean to you to repent? What do you think are some keys to repentance? What are some obstacles to repentance in your own experience? How do you think those obstacles are potentially aspects of pretense that undermine your interests to have a humble attitude before God?
- 4 What are you most afraid of God revealing if you truly ask God to show you the depths of your heart? What do you think God could really do in your life if he exposed the darkest pretenses and invited you to humbly repent from them? How do you hope your life could be different if you were no longer attached to the pretenses holding power over you and keeping you distant from intimacy with God?

### **Lets Talk About 13: Condescension**

- 1 What are some of your thoughts and feelings when you consider what it means that Jesus willingly and willfully left his place, his privilege, and his power at the right hand of the Father to dwell among us, assume our sin, and atone for our debt?
- 2 How does Jesus’ condescension embody humility to the utmost extent? What do you think is important to notice about Jesus humility that you can apply to your own attitude?
- 3 What do you think motivated Jesus to condescend? What do you think is the relationship between Jesus’ motives and humility? In what ways do you think your motives can both be shaped by humility and also cause you to have a more humble attitude?
- 4 What do you think it means, in day-to-day terms, to think of yourself humbly?

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### PART III: SIN MAKES YOU HOLY

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#### **Lets Talk About 14: The Disciple He Loved**

- 1 How do you define love? Using Jesus as the standard or benchmark, is your definition adequate or does it need to be changed to better reflect love in the ways that Jesus showed it? If so, how?
- 2 What do you think is significant about the fact that the Apostle John never refers to himself by name, but only as “the disciple that Jesus loved?” How do you see glimpses of John’s humility in writing of himself this way? What are some of your thoughts about Jesus or his motivations related to John, when you see that John completely saw himself in this context of being totally loved by Jesus?
- 3 Do you see yourself as being “a disciple that Jesus loves?” Why or why not? How could your inability to see yourself as being completely loved and accepted by Jesus be an indication of a problem with pride? How might your thoughts, attitudes, or even actions be different if you more intentionally embrace how much Jesus loves you?
- 4 Love is an expression of relationship. How well do you love others? What are the conditions attached to your love? In what ways do you love like Jesus loved others? In what ways does your love for others have room for improvement? How can loving others the way Jesus loved others be an expression of having a humble heart?

#### **Lets Talk About 15: Complete Joy**

- 1 How do you describe joy? How is joy similar to happiness? How is it different? When do you tend to notice having joy in your life? When do you tend to notice that joy is lacking or absent in your life?
- 2 What have been some of your personal experiences with God that have brought you great joy? How do these experiences show that joy is an expression of your relationship with God much more than it is a result of your behavior for God?
- 3 What does it mean to you to live in spiritual darkness? By comparison, what does it look like to “walk in the light” of God? How do you personally navigate that relational journey, day-by-day? What aspects of this journey are most challenging to you?
- 4 How do you think being intentional to love God and love other people helps you keep a humble attitude? Remembering what you’ve understood about confession, what do you think its role may be in helping you walk in the light of God’s love and truth? Where do you sense God’s Spirit speaking to you about dark or hidden parts of your life that he wants to bring into his light?

#### **Lets Talk About 16: Forget Perfect**

- 1 Briefly share your story how you came to put your trust that Jesus is God, that he came to forgive your sins, and take complete leadership over your life. If you haven’t yet had that experience, and you sense God is leading you to this moment of trusting Jesus in this way, now is the right time for doing so. The Apostle Paul explained it this way: “If you openly say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from death, you will be saved.... Yes, ‘everyone who trusts in the Lord will be saved’ (Rom. 10:9-10, 13, ERV).

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- 2 What do you think keeps you from admitting your shortcomings or sins to other people? What do you think people would think about you if they knew more about your imperfections and struggles? What does God think about you, knowing everything about you perfectly and completely?
- 3 Do you continue to sin, even if you have a story of being forgiven and saved by Jesus? Why do you think that is? What does that tell you about the problem of sin? What does that tell you about the need for forgiveness and salvation? What does that indicate about the ongoing need for confession?
- 4 Is it difficult to describe yourself as a sinner? Why or why not? Why do you think it is important to think rightly about your sin, as well as your sin nature? How does having a right understanding about these things help you in your relationship with God?

### **Lets Talk About 17: You Loser**

- 1 The Apostle Paul enthusiastically affirmed God's love this way: "I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord!" (Rom. 8:38, CEB). How does it make you feel to know that God forgave you of all your sins and imperfections for your whole life and never stops loving you when you mess up, even after you've been forgiven? How do these realities help empower you to be more open and honest with your own sin struggles?
- 2 When you think about a sin habit that's been a personal struggle of yours, how did that struggle begin? How did it become ingrained or entangled into your life? What are some of your thoughts and feelings when you find yourself tempted by this particular sin? What are some of your thoughts and feelings when you succumb to it? What do you think and feel when you resist and overcome those temptations? What does it look like to confess all this to God who knows you completely and loves you perfectly?
- 3 What does it mean to you to be "cleansed from unrighteousness?" What does it feel like to you to "feel" cleansed from unrighteousness by being forgiven? How do you think that this experience contributes to helping you avoid continuing in sin?
- 4 What is spiritual arrogance? Do you ever express it? If so, when have you done this? What can cause a Christ-follower to behave arrogantly? How is an arrogant attitude just as problematic as habitual, nagging sin? Why do you think God cares as much about addressing spiritual arrogance as he does about addressing other kinds of pride and sin?

### **Lets Talk About 18: What's So Amazing About Grace?**

- 1 What is your understanding of grace? How do you experience common grace in your relationships with other people? How do you give grace? In what ways do you receive grace? How is grace independent or unrelated to merit? Why do you think that's important?



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- 2 How have you received grace from God, in a common sense (ways that all people experience God's grace)? How have you experienced God's grace in a specific, or unique way? In what ways is all this grace unmerited? What does this reveal about God?
- 3 What aspects of Pharaoh's encounters with God through Moses (and experiences with God's grace, by context) resonate with your own life experiences? Have you ever trivialized, misused, or even abused God's grace? What has been the consequential effect of those actions: on you? on God's grace?
- 4 How does it make you feel to know that God's grace is still perfect, and perfectly able to receive your humble heart of repentance and confession, regardless of all past assaults or neglects against it (and him)?

### **Lets Talk About 19: Do You Hear It?**

- 1 How do you define or describe "conviction" in a general sense? What are some of the positive ways you see "conviction" used in our culture? What are some negative ways the term is used? Do you view "conviction of sin" positively or negatively?
- 2 How does it affect your understanding of your previous answer in knowing that conviction of sin is the work of the Holy Spirit? Does this implication change your understanding? Why or why not?
- 3 Why do you think God's Holy Spirit does the work of convicting you of your sin? Reviewing what you know about God (or what you've learned), how does God feel about you? How does God feel about your sin? What, then, would you expect a good, all-powerful God to do about your sin, since it is in his capacity to do so? How does this affect your understanding of conviction?
- 4 Why do you think we tend to receive God's conviction as shame, rather than correction? What lies do we have to believe to embrace this distortion? What truths do we need to embrace to reject the lies that attempt to distort conviction to shame? Where does this affect you personally?

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### PART IV: CONFESS YOUR SINS TO ONE ANOTHER

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#### **Lets Talk About 20: The Prayer of What?**

- 1 How do you define or describe faith? The Apostle Paul defined faith this way: Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Heb. 11:1, ESV). What do you think is more important: your faith itself or what you put your faith in? Explain your response.
- 2 What are different things that people put faith in? How are those expressions of faith different than trusting in Jesus? How is your faith expressed and/or experienced through prayer?
- 3 What does it mean to you that God promises to give you wisdom if you ask him for it? What is wisdom? How is God's wisdom different than any other kind of wisdom? How would your trials and temptations be different if you have more access to God's wisdom for those difficult circumstances?
- 4 How do you think God's wisdom has the power to change you? How can it change how you think? How can it change your attitudes? How can it change what you do? Why do you think God's so interested in changing you, if he loves you just as you are? How do you think God uses prayer to affect change in you?

#### **Lets Talk About 21: OK, You Go First**

- 1 What does it mean to you to be considered "righteous"? Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Does it matter who's considering you that way? Is it easy or difficult to believe James' claim that, "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16)? Why? How do you see yourself in light of this promise?
- 2 A Christ-follower is *positionally* righteous because they've been forgiven by Jesus, but still experiences *circumstantial* unrighteousness because of sin. How do you think confession cleanses us from all unrighteousness, in this regard? What does this look like in your life?
- 3 How do prayers of confession express vulnerability to others? How have you seen these types of prayers be healthy and helpful in your faith relationships?
- 4 Imagine if prayers of authentic confession were absent from the Christian life. How much of your own life would be unaddressed? How many of your most significant needs would be neglected? In what ways do you think your life or the lives of others could be markedly worse without the ability to reach out for and receive help from God as well as from other people?

#### **Lets Talk About 22: Because James Isn't His Older Brother**

- 1 What's scarier or more intimidating to you: confessing your sins to God, or confessing your sins to another person? Why? What do you risk confessing your sins to God? What do you risk confessing your sins to another person?
- 2 Does it change your perspective to think about confessing to other people those sins that you've already confessed to God? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?

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- 3 How can confessing your sins to other people be helpful to them? What can it reveal to them about God's grace? About God's power? About God's love? About God's goodness?
- 4 Do you ever feel like your prayers are weak? Do you see any relationship between weakness in prayer and fear or unwillingness to confess your sins to God? How do you think your relationship with God can benefit by coming to terms with your own sin and releasing it to him in confession and repentance?

### PART V: KEEP PRAYING, GOD ISN'T ANNOYED

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#### **Lets Talk About 23: Why Did You Stop?**

- 1 What's something that was important enough that you took to God in prayer...a lot? Did you persevere—keep praying—or did you give up? If you kept going, why? If you stopped praying, why? What was the outcome? What role do you think your prayer did—or didn't—contribute?
- 2 What are some reasons for prayerlessness, either that keep you from praying or continuing in prayer, or are reasons that you have heard other people say in explaining why they don't pray? What do these reasons reveal about a flawed or distorted view of God, or about having relationship with God through Jesus?
- 3 Why do you think God wants us to persist in prayer? Why doesn't he just answer our prayers the first time we pray them? What could be some of the benefits in delayed answers or even non-answers to our prayers?
- 4 What does it look like in your life to ask God for help? Do you pray for help? How often? For what type of things? What type of things tend to be excluded from these prayers, either intentionally or unintentionally? Why?

#### **Lets Talk About 24: Impudent Prayer**

- 1 How do you pray? Do you follow a prayer routine or pattern? Do you pray at the same times of the day? Do you pray rote, written, repeated prayers, or are your prayers more spontaneous or free-thought? Do you pray long, eloquent prayers, or short, pithy prayers? Do you pray on a schedule or whenever the interest hits?
- 2 Do you concern yourself with what other people think about your prayer? Why?
- 3 How does it make you feel to know that God eagerly receives you with his undivided attention every time you engage with him in prayer?
- 4 What does your prayer reveal about your sense of importance of the matters of your prayers? Do you think your importance can be conveyed to God without the need for eloquence or wordiness?

#### **Lets Talk About 25: Persistent, Annoying, Bothersome Prayer**

- 1 Have you ever found yourself questioning God amidst praying repeatedly, continually over a matter? What were some of the things you may have either asked God directly, or wondered about God? Why do you think we ask these questions when we wait for prayers to be answered?

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- 2 Have you ever prayed for something only to be thankful after the fact that God *didn't* answer the prayer ask you were asking? If so, why? Do we ever pray for the wrong things, or pray for the wrong reasons? What are some of the wrong motives that get expressed in prayer?
- 3 How do you think humility serves as a governor or safe-guard against praying selfishly? How does humility empower us to pray selfless prayers persistently?
- 4 What specifically do you think persistent, humble prayers express about your faith in God? What does it look like in your life to pray passionately a persistent, humble prayer?

### **Lets Talk About 26: Somebody Changes, But It's Not God**

- 1 How does prayer affect you? How do describe your feelings, your state of mind, or your sense of self when you pray? How is that different than when you aren't praying?
- 2 How does prayer change you? How have you seen prayer affect or influence your personality outside or beyond your prayer life? If so, why do you think that is? Do you think that influence/affect is a good thing? If you haven't seen any affect or influence, what do you think it could indicate about your sense of prayer, or even your practices of praying?
- 3 Why do you think God uses prayer to change us, shape us, or mature us? How does God's ability to do this show his love and regard for you?
- 4 Do you see God's interest in shaping you as a good thing? How would you like to improve? In what ways would you like your life to be more consistently good or selfless? How do you think spending time with God can be beneficial to that interest?

## PART VI: UNANSWERED PRAYER

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### **Lets Talk About 27: Consider the Lilies**

- 1 Consider any aspect of God's creation you'd like to consider. What does it tell you about the Creator? How well does he care for his creation? How does he provide for it? If he attends to his creation in this way, what does that say about you, who he loves with a unique, special regard?
- 2 Revisit a time when God didn't answer your prayer. What were the circumstances? Where was God amidst it all? What do you know about God that you didn't know then? What do you know about prayer that you didn't know then?
- 3 How often does God answer your prayers exactly the way you want? Have you ever been surprised by an answer to prayer? How "open handed" are you about your prayers? Are your prayers more about what you want from God or about just being with God and sharing your needs and asking him to show you his work in your life?
- 4 How have you seen God's answers to your prayers be bigger or better than the answers you were asking for or anticipating? How have you seen God care for you better than you could have asked for, or even better than you have asked for?



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### **Lets Talk About 28: God Doesn't Hurry or Rush**

- 1 How do you define patience? How patient or impatient are you? How patient or impatient would the person who knows you best say you are? When is it hard for you to be patient? Is it difficult to be patient when you are waiting on God?
- 2 Do you ever think about God's patience with waiting on you? What do you think it means to consider patience as God's appointed time to meet with him as you wait? What do you think God accomplishes in you while you are waiting? How can this perspective affect your outlook on waiting?
- 3 Have you ever been like Sarah, where you "helped God out" and took matters into your own hands? What were the circumstances? What was the outcome?
- 4 Have you ever been surprised to see God answer a prayer that you had considered to be "unanswered"? If so, what were the circumstances? What did that teach you about God? What did that teach you about yourself? How did that affect your prayer afterward?

### **Lets Talk About 29: Pray, Even If It's For the Wrong Thing**

- 1 Do you ever wonder or worry about whether you're praying for the right thing? Or praying wrong? If so, what are some of your thoughts or questions when you're feeling this way?
- 2 Why do you think it's more important to be intentional about praying than it is about being exactly right about everything you're praying about? What do you think you can expect about your prayers over time, the more you pray?
- 3 What do you think your prayers should look like when you don't know how to pray?
- 4 How can humility position you to pray well, even if your prayers are characterized by simplicity or ignorance or a profound sense of inadequacy?

### **Lets Talk About 30: We're Going On A Bear Hunt**

- 1 Share a prayer that went unanswered - a healing that didn't occur, a marriage that wasn't restored, an addiction that wasn't overcome, a sin that wasn't defeated. Resisting any temptation to "defend God" or explain away anything, share any thoughts or feelings the experience caused you.
- 2 What does it mean to you that God is working out our circumstances in the context of our living in a sinful, fallen world, and in the reality that we are living in sinful, fallen bodies? What are the implications of God's work amidst all this sin?
- 3 How does it make you feel to know that Jesus experienced unanswered prayer? In Jesus' surrender, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done" (Matthew 26:42), he both acknowledges that his unanswered prayer is necessary for the Father's will to be done, and in his prayer being unanswered, he makes it possible for our prayers to be answered. How do these realities compel you toward humility?
- 4 How have you seen God's love and ministering care in those times when your prayers went unanswered, or were answered far differently than how you had asked? How did God strengthen you? How does it make you feel that, in those times where God doesn't deliver you from the painful ugliness of life, he promises to be with you and faithfully lead you through it?

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### **Lets Talk About 31: Big Announcement!**

- 1 What is something that God has shown you about himself through this book?
- 2 What is something that God has shown you about yourself through this book?
- 3 What is something that God has shown you about other people and the world through this book?
- 4 What is something that God has shown you about prayer through this book?
- 5 What is one takeaway from this book that impacts your relationship with God?
- 6 What is one takeaway from this book that impacts your relationship with other people?