

MARKED

 BY 

PRAYER

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Leader Study Guide

This discussion guide was created to assist leaders using *Marked by Prayer* with their group. The guide assumes that the group will meet weekly or bi-weekly and discuss one chapter of the book.

Tip: As you read, highlight paragraphs and record your ideas and questions in the margin. During the group time, point to the items you highlighted and invite the group to respond to the content you highlighted. You may also ask them to point out sentences or paragraphs that stood out to them, allowing them to share their reasons for highlighting that sentence or paragraph.



SESSION ONE (INTRODUCTION)

PREPARE

Direct participants to secure a copy of *Marked by Prayer* and to read the introduction prior to the group time.

Gather sticky notes or name tags.

ARRIVAL

Provide sticky notes to the participants as they arrive. Direct them to record on the notes ways they have been “marked” in life (experiences, relationships, physically, faith, etc). Encourage them to record only one mark per note. Add the notes to a wall or table. After most have arrived, review the notes. Allow volunteers to share if desired.

Option: As participants arrive, direct them to create a name tag, including their name and at least two ways they have been marked in life. As they introduce themselves to other participants, encourage them to share about the marking they listed on their name tag.

Transition: Over the next few weeks, we will examine insights gained from *Marked by Prayer*. Our focus today is the introduction.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Lead the group in discussion using the following questions:

- Reflect on a moment when prayer changed something in your life. What symbol would you use to illustrate that change? What symbol do you think the author of *Marked by Prayer* may use to illustrate the prayer described in the introduction (pages 3-4)?
- The author says prayer is not the fruit of the spirit but the pathway to producing that spiritual fruit (page 3). How does prayer develop love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and the other spiritual fruit listed in Galatians 5?
- What might keep a person from being marked by prayer? How would you rank the items listed from most prevalent to least prevalent?

CONCLUSION

Explain that *Marked by Prayer* proposes five marks found in people characterized by prayer; helplessness, Scripture is central, personal grief, deferred confidence, and presence-minded. Point them to the table of contents to give them a better understanding of what is meant by each of these terms.

Share that each week the group will meet and discuss one chapter, moving through the book. Note that each chapter follows the same pattern: the mark described, how a Bible character displayed that mark, and how that mark is developed in person. Each chapter also includes actions we can take in the *Your Turn* section and some additional personal study in the *Taking a Deeper Look / Dig Deeper* sections (point to page 14 as an example). Encourage the group to read Chapter 1 and work on the *Your Turn* and *Deeper Look* activities before the next group time.

Close in prayer, using John 13:35 to guide the prayer time.



SESSION 2 (CHAPTER 1: HELPLESS)

PREPARE

Read chapter 1 and complete the *Your Turn* and *Deeper Look* activities on page 14. Be sure to create a list of passages that include “wait” and “seek.”

Secure a can opener.

ARRIVAL

As participants arrive, call attention to the can opener. Direct them to share any “electric can opener” moments—a time when something simple became overwhelming. Encourage them to include how they felt during that experience. Highlight any expressions of feeling helpless.

Transition: During today’s time, we will look at what it means to be helpless and how that feeling impacts our prayer lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you typically respond when you feel helpless; seek help, withdraw, look for a way out, fix it on your own, or pray?
- How does helplessness deepen our prayer life? To what level do you agree with the idea that helplessness is required for being marked by prayer? Explain.
- What similarities and differences do you see in how David and Jeremiah were driven by a sense of helplessness? (Note: point to the other examples listed in the second paragraph of *Taking a Deeper Look* on page 14). How can helplessness become a turning point in someone’s faith journey?
- What are some practical ways we can encourage others to wait and seek? What would you tell a friend who told you they felt helpless?

CLOSING

Call attention to the *Taking a Deeper Look* section, highlighting the third action listed (the concordance search). Invite volunteers to share passages they discovered that include wait and seek.

Call attention to Psalm 37:7, explaining that being still and waiting are the same actions. Remark that waiting and being still remind us of our need for sitting in God’s presence in our helpless moments.

Call attention to the *Your Turn* activity. Allow volunteers to share what they listed in response to the section. Review Psalm 13. Lead the group in a time of prayer, using Psalm 13 to shape the prayer time.



SESSION 3 (CHAPTER 2: SCRIPTURE IS CENTRAL)

PREPARE

Read Chapter 2, making notes and highlighting key paragraphs.

Complete the *Your Turn* and *Taking a Deeper Look* sections on pages 27-28.

ARRIVAL

As the group arrives, ask who can recall one truth gained from the most recent Bible study or sermon heard. Invite them to share how that truth impacted them.

After most have arrived, explain that this session will focus on the role Scripture and Bible study should play in our prayer lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you respond to the author comparing Scripture to a movie line defining a community of people?
- What is the difference between praying Scripture and biblically informed prayer?
- Jesus quoted Psalm 22 and 31 while on the cross. What does this teach us about how Scripture can guide our prayers and give us a means to express our deepest emotions?
- How do your current prayer practices reflect your understanding of Scripture? In what areas do you rely on our own thoughts and ideas more than on Scripture when praying?
- What are the dangers of praying without letting Scripture inform your prayer?
- How does the study of Scripture help you align your prayers with God's purposes?
- What does it mean to let God take the lead in our prayer conversations? What might that look like?

CLOSING

Call attention to the *Your Turn* activity on pages 27-28.

Ask: How do the two questions (*How does God reveal Himself in this passage?* and *How do I respond to how God reveals Himself?*) help us pray more meaningfully?

Share the prayer you recorded in response to a recent Bible study. Invite volunteers to share what they recorded when they completed this activity. Point to the examples provided on pages 25-27 if needed. Lead in a time of prayer, using the responses recorded in *Your Turn* for session 2.



SESSION 4 (CHAPTER 3: PERSONAL GRIEF)

PREPARE

Read Chapter 3, making notes and highlighting key paragraphs.

Complete the *Your Turn* and *Taking a Deeper Look* sections on page 41.

Collect items associated with grief such as black clothing, flowers, empty ice cream container (some binge snack when grieved), and facial tissues.

ARRIVAL

As the group arrives, point to the display of items associated with grief. Invite the group to review the items and suggest different ways the items are related. As they share, listen for responses that relate to grief. After most have arrived, explain that each item represents grief in some way.

Transition: Our time together today will be spent reflecting on the mark of personal grief over sin, our sin, and the sin of others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you respond to the questions posed by the author: Can we truly understand the hurt sin causes God? (page 31) (Option: Lead the group to share passages discovered in the *Deeper Look* activity on page 41. Guide them to identify how the passages listed impact their view of sin). Why might we avoid thinking about the hurt caused by sin? What keeps us from grieving over sin?
- Who do you most identify with: Abraham, Abimelech, or Daniel? Explain.
- Compare Abraham's excuses with Abimelech's responses. How do their excuses and responses help us understand spiritual sensitivity and ownership of sin?
- What makes grief over sin essential for a healthy prayer life? How does grief deepen our relationship with God?
- How can a person cultivate a heart that grieves over sin without falling into despair?
- What is the difference between admitting sin and owning it? How does owning it open the door for healing and growth?
- How does grieving over another person's sin reflect God's love?

CLOSING

Call attention to the *Your Turn* activity on page 41. Focus on the second paragraph. Lead the group to read Psalm 38. Guide them to consider how God reveals Himself in this psalm and encourage them to propose ways we may respond. Call attention to the question posed at the end of the paragraph (*What do you need to own before God, admitting and repenting of that sin?*). Assure the group that you will not be asking anyone to share publicly. Lead the group in a time of silent prayer, using Psalm 38 as a guide.



SESSION 5 (CHAPTER 4: DEFERRED CONFIDENCE)

PREPARE

Read Chapter 4, making notes and highlighting key paragraphs.

Complete the *Your Turn* and *Taking a Deeper Look* sections on pages 53-54.

ARRIVAL

As the group arrives, call for them to share words or phrases that come to mind when they hear the word “defer.” Record responses as they are shared. After most have arrived, review the responses. Lead the group to identify words listed that could be used to describe the intent of the author using deferred in chapter 4. Explain that the focus of this session is gaining a deeper understanding of deferred confidence in our prayer lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does the illustration point to praying with palms together (page 44) change how you view the position you take when praying? How does it illustrate deferred confidence?
- How does deferred confidence impact how we understand unanswered prayer?
- Why do we tend to pray after making plans instead of before? What does when we pray about a task say about who or what we trust?
- Why might the temptation of taking credit yourself overshadow the consequences of failing to defer credit to God?
- What examples beyond Joseph from Scripture can you point to that demonstrate deferred confidence? (Highlight David and Psalm 131, see Digging Deeper on page 54.)
- The author identified five actions that foster deferred confidence (serve others, credit others, examine motives, seek God’s direction, and pray without ceasing; pages 50-53). How would you rank these from easiest to most difficult? Explain your reasons for the ranking.

CLOSING

Ask: How does serving others foster deferred confidence? Call attention to the first paragraph under *Your Turn* on page 53. Remind the group that they are not to share what they did or are doing as an act of service. Lead them to share what they learned about themselves through that experience without speaking of the actual action taken. Challenge them to continue to find ways of serving others with no intention of getting recognized.

Highlight the second paragraph under *Your Turn*. Invite a volunteer to share about a characteristic of God and the color they associated with that characteristic. Close in prayer, focusing on the characteristic of God identified.



SESSION 6 (CHAPTER 5: PRESENCE MINDED)

PREPARE

Read Chapter 5, making notes and highlighting key paragraphs.

Complete the *Your Turn* and *Dig Deeper* sections on pages 66-67.

Pre-enlist someone in the group to be ready to share insights they recorded when completing the *Dig Deeper* feature on page 57.

ARRIVAL

As the group arrives, invite them to record the name of a teacher or professor who they enjoyed as a student. Encourage them to compare their teacher to the one described in the introduction to chapter 5 of *Marked by Prayer*. Emphasize responses that focus on being in the presence of that teacher. After most have arrived, explain that during this session the fifth mark—presence minded—will be explored.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be “presence minded”? How would you explain that term to a young child?
- Do you view being in God’s presence as a positive or a negative? How does God’s presence produce uneasiness and contentment at the same time?
- How do the two Mary’s demonstrate a hunger for God’s presence?
- What does being satisfied in God’s presence look like to you?
- The author identified sin, neglect, and assumption as hindrances to being in God’s presence. What other items would you add to that list?
- How can we foster a deeper desire to be in God’s presence without trying to control when and how He shows up?

CLOSING

Call attention to the *Dig Deeper* feature on page 57. Invite the pre-enlisted person to share insights gained from the exercise. Allow others to add to what is shared. Call for the group to identify ways God has revealed His character to them in the past week. Guide the group to suggest ways of responding to how God revealed himself. Lead the group in a time of prayer, thanking God for showing His character to the group and committing to respond appropriately to Him.



SESSION 7 (CHAPTER 6: FOUNDATION)

PREPARE

Read Chapter 6, making notes and highlighting key paragraphs.

Complete the *Your Turn* and *Taking a Deeper Look* sections on pages 79-80.

ARRIVAL

As the group arrives, call attention to the story of William Bowen Campbell (pages 68-69) and the tandem bike riders (page 77). Invite the group to share other ways of illustrating the concept of following. Call attention to the final sentence in chapter 5 prior to the *Your Turn* activity (The assumption here is that we are following Jesus close enough to tap Him on the shoulder and ask Him for His thoughts. page 66), connecting the five marks to following Jesus. Explain that the focus of this session is chapter 6 and the foundation of the five marks.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does “following Jesus” define who we are as believers? (see page 70)
- How can we cultivate the daily habit of declaring our intent to follow Jesus? What practices have you found to be helpful?
- How does Habakkuk’s journey from questioning to trusting God reflect a foundation of faith?
- What does “follow Jesus no matter what” look like in today’s world? How do the lives of Peter, the rich young ruler, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednigo inform how we respond to this question?
- What obstacles might a person allow to get in the way of following Jesus wholeheartedly? How can those obstacles be addressed?

CLOSING

Call attention to the author’s story shared in “Building the Foundation” on pages 78-79. Share how you became a follower of Jesus and the difference that decision made in your life. Invite others to share their salvation stories as well. Offer to visit further after the group time with anyone who may have doubts or questions about following Jesus.

Remind the group of the story behind placing our palms together when we pray (see page 44). Lead the group to get on one knee with their palms together as a declaration of surrender to Jesus. Conclude in a time of prayer, thanking Jesus for inviting you and the others in the group to follow Him, and to pledge to surrender to Him as a loyal follower of His.



SESSION 8 (CONCLUSION)

PREPARE

Read the Conclusion, making notes and highlighting key paragraphs.

Review Chapters 1-6, creating a summary of each chapter as you do so.

Create a visual that lists the five characteristics of people marked by prayer.

ARRIVAL

As the group arrives, call attention to a listing of the five characteristics of a person marked by prayer. Call for individuals to identify the characteristic(s) that most resonate with them. Explain that the purpose of this session is to review key points from the book, consider the challenge offered in the conclusion, and consider next steps.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does the story of the praying men give us a picture of what it means to be marked by prayer? What role did their persistence play in seeing God answer their prayers?
- The author presents a set of scenarios calling on the readers to imagine (see page 83). Which of those situations most captivates your heart?
- What might keep people from being marked by prayer? How can we encourage them to take steps to move toward being marked by prayer?

CLOSING

Call attention to the list used during the arrival activity. Use the review notes created when preparing to lead this session to help the group recall key points from *Marked by Prayer*. Invite volunteers to share how they have been impacted by reading and discussing the content of the book.

Place the group into pairs. Direct them to share with each other one thing they want to see God do in their church, their community, and their family. Encourage them to identify Bible passages that relate to the requests shared. Guide them to pray with each other using the Bible passages identified to inform their prayers.