

PRAYER

FINDING INTIMACY WITH GOD

LEADER'S RESOURCE GUIDE SESSION 2



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

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Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver, November 2015

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Formed.org

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 978-0-9966768-6-1

SESSION 2

GUIGO'S LADDER: A WAY OF ASCENT

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

In the last session, prayer was described as a conversation that has to go both ways: we not only speak to God in prayer, but we must also listen to God speak to us, especially as we read his Word in Scripture. Much of the difficulty of prayer comes when we make prayer into a monologue and neglect to listen.

St. John's account of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (see John 4:1–43) provides us a model of prayer. This narrative teaches us that God initiates the encounter of prayer and guides us through it. When the Samaritan woman approaches the well, Jesus is already there, and it is he who initiates the conversation. This order recalls the Jewish prayer of the *Shema*—"Hear, O Israel" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). God speaks, and Israel is to listen. Our first position in prayer is to be the one who listens. If we approach God with humility and listen, then we can ask for what God already knows we need.

As Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman continues, Jesus speaks of "living water" (see John 4:10, 14). Here Jesus draws on the words of the prophet Jeremiah, who in telling of Israel's unfaithfulness describes God as the "fountain of living waters" (see Jeremiah 2:13). When we understand this background, we realize that the living water that Jesus promises is his very self.

Dr. Gray closes this session speaking about the twelfth-century monk, Guigo the Carthusian. Guigo describes the order of prayer we call *lectio divina*, the divine reading, as a ladder with four rungs, with each rung carrying us closer to God. The four rungs of the ladder of prayer are: reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. This well-worn and established order of prayer helps facilitate our interaction with, and our response to, God. God is ready and waiting for us to meet him in prayer, and Guigo's ladder offers us a clear path from the noise and concerns of our daily lives to communion with God in prayer. With practice we can ascend the ladder with greater ease and more fully reap the fruits of our time with God.



CONNECT

*Begin this session by leading the **Opening Prayer**, and then read or summarize the **Introduction** for your group. Both can be found in the Study Guide.*

*If you have time, review the last session with your group. Can anyone can recite the **Memory Verse**, Song of Solomon 3:2, without assistance? Otherwise, look it up (page 6) and recite it as a group.*

*Also discuss any highlights or questions the group may have had from the last session's **COMMIT** reflections. Then continue.*

Think of a time you felt incredibly thirsty. What quenched your thirst and refreshed you? Describe the experience.

Sample answers include: finding refreshment in a drink of water after a long hike; a cold beer after mowing the lawn on a hot day; etc. There will likely be a common theme of heat and labor causing thirst, followed by a drink that is cool, refreshing, and satisfying. This conversation sets the stage for the story of Jesus asking the Samaritan woman for a drink of water, as well as the contrast between the image of God as "living water" (fresh, flowing water) and the dryness of a broken cistern of our own making (Jeremiah 2:13).

How do you show others that you are listening attentively to them?

Active listening often includes eye contact, responsive motions (nodding the head, facial expressions reflecting what the speaker is talking about, etc.), "listening sounds" such as "mm-hmmm" or other short responses: "Yes, I know what you mean," etc. Answers may include any other aspects of giving someone your full attention, such as putting your phone away, not looking at your watch, asking questions to clarify or continue the conversation on a deeper level. This session focuses on God initiating the conversation of prayer, and so our prayer starts with us listening to God speak—we have to give him our full attention if we want a fruitful conversation.



Play the video segment, which will last about 29 minutes. The Study Guide provides participants with a brief outline of the topics covered in the video teaching, along with the following discussion questions.



DISCUSS

After the video segment, discuss the following questions. Familiarize yourself with the comments after each question; these are meant to guide you in the conversation.

THE LADDER OF PRAYER

1. What was one thing you heard for the first time or that was an "aha" moment for you?

Some new or particularly striking ideas might include: the comparison between "living water" and a broken cistern, that God is the one who initiates prayer, or the four rungs of the ladder of prayer and why it is important that they proceed in that particular order.

2. How does the account of the Samaritan woman at the well model an encounter with Christ in prayer? How do you relate to this account?

It is a model of prayer because Christ initiates the conversation and the woman responds. There is dialogue. Christ offers living water (the Spirit), and we receive the gift of God in prayer. The conversation opens the eyes of the woman and leads her to a deeper understanding of truth. The encounter changes her. Participants will relate in different ways—some may identify closely with the woman, feeling surprised at God speaking to them, coming to prayer with specific concerns, and leaving with a different understanding of what they really need, etc.

3. Have you ever tried to go straight to the top of the ladder of prayer without making use of the different rungs? Did it work? Do you feel the rungs are evenly spaced (equally easy or difficult to move between each step), or is there one step on the ladder that is particularly hard for you? Why?

The ladder of prayer will be new to some and may be familiar to others—experience in using the multiple rungs of prayer will vary. Most of us have probably tried, at some point or another, to achieve contemplation without going through the other steps, and without a great deal of practice this usually doesn't work very well. Encourage participants to share which rungs they find easy or difficult—lectio and oratio may seem to come naturally, but being still and listening in meditatio and contemplatio may be much harder. Or some may find it difficult to focus during lectio or know what to say during oratio. A particular rung may be extra difficult because we usually skip it and are out of practice.

*Direct participants to this session's **Memory Verse** in their Study Guides, and read it together. Then lead the **Closing Prayer**. Encourage participants to do the **COMMIT** reflections on their own before you meet again as a group.*



COMMIT

*Following are suggested answers to the questions participants will be asked to reflect upon in their daily **COMMIT** reflections.*

DAY 1 – HEAR, O ISRAEL

Participants will examine the Shema, the ancient prayer of Israel, and the importance of listening to God in Israel's theology of prayer.

God won't let anything get in the way of drawing close to us in prayer. What is getting in your way of listening and responding?

Both internal and external factors get in the way of listening and responding to God in prayer. We might be distracted with our own thoughts; struggling with fear or anger or doubt, which can get in the way of prayer; or letting pride get in the way by relying on ourselves too much when it comes to prayer. We may simply not be giving prayer enough time each day.

DAY 2 – LIVING WATER

Participants will explore the imagery of water as it relates to God in Scripture and study the gift of himself that God offers in prayer.

Look up the following passages: Psalm 65:9; Isaiah 12:3; Isaiah 44:3; Revelation 21:6; Revelation 22:1-2. What do these passages have in common? Why do you think Scripture uses water as an image of God?

In each of these passages, God is described as a life-giving source of water—watering crops (Psalm 65:9); providing salvation as one draws water (Isaiah 12:3); watering the dry ground and pouring out his Spirit (Isaiah 44:3); satisfying thirst, offering forgiveness/eternal life (Revelation 21–22), etc. Water is essential for life, and this fact is particularly well-appreciated in an arid climate such as that of the Holy Land. The image of a life-giving water source communicates God's abundant generosity as well as his sustaining love.

When it comes to prayer, are you actively seeking to receive God's free gift or do you build your own cistern? Do you try to make fruitful prayer happen on your own, or do you let God lead? How can you be more aware of prayer as a gift from God?

We all have experiences of relying on ourselves too much, even in prayer. It may still be a very strong struggle, or it may be something we have largely overcome. Regularly thanking God for the gift of prayer and the gift of himself offered in prayer can be a good reminder that we are receiving his free gift rather than accomplishing something on our own power. Reflecting on and perhaps memorizing one of the Scriptures above about God as living water may also be a useful tool.



DAY 3 – LECTIO: JESUS AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

Participants will reflect on the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well.

LECTIO

How many times are “Samaria” and “Samaritans” mentioned in this passage?
Six times (all in the first half of the reading).

How many references are there to thirst or drinking or water in this passage?
Nineteen times (including each reference to the well).

What does the physical setting of this encounter tell you about how Jesus was likely feeling? The Samaritan woman?

The sixth hour means it was noon—heat of the day, no shade. Jesus is weary from his journey, and presumably hungry and thirsty (based on the mention of the disciples going to get food and his request for a drink). The woman is likely hot and tired from her walk to the well. She comes in the heat of the day, alone, so she is isolated from the other women of her village. She may be surprised to find someone else at the well, and perhaps uncomfortable that he speaks to her.

MEDITATIO

Why is the Samaritan woman surprised that Jesus asks her for a drink? What does Jesus' willingness to talk to this woman and St. John's comment on the “necessity” of Jesus passing through Samaria teach us about prayer?

Jews and Samaritans didn't mix, and furthermore Jewish men did not speak to unfamiliar women in public. The Samaritan woman is surprised because “Christ's way of acting, the Gospel of his words and deeds, is a consistent protest against whatever offends the dignity of women” (St. Pope John Paul II, Mulieris Dignitatem, 15) against whatever offends the dignity of his sons and daughters. Jesus' words and actions tell us that God wants to reach out to each of us, despite our sin and brokenness. We can't bridge the gap between ourselves and God on our own, but he can and will.

What is unique about the water that Jesus offers? What do you think it means to never thirst after receiving the living water?

Several things are unique about the water that Jesus offers: it is a gift of God, it is sufficient to satisfy our longing (other things will leave us longing once again), it brings eternal life, etc. One meaning of never thirsting again is that we are created for union with God, and only once we have that relationship will we be satisfied. In the words of St. Augustine: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that she would respond differently if she knew who it is that is speaking to her (verse 10). When you pray, are you mindful of “who it is” that is speaking to you? What difference does it make to approach prayer with humility and reverence rather than as something casual and routine?

God is our Father; Jesus is our Lord and our Brother—so there are multiple factors at work in how we approach prayer. It is good to approach God in prayer with both a confidence and a familiarity, but also with an appropriate reverence. Making prayer a priority and remembering to praise and adore God and thank him for his gifts before making requests of him are two ways to practice mindfulness in prayer. Approaching prayer with humility and reverence is crucial because in order to have an intimate conversation and form that close relationship, we have to be honest about who we are in relation to God and be mindful of who God is.



DAY 4 – GUIGO AND THE LADDER OF PRAYER

Participants will explore the four rungs of Guigo's ladder of prayer.

Why must the ladder of prayer begin with Scripture? How might the practice of praying with Scripture help you to fulfill St. Paul's exhortation to “pray constantly” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)?

Prayer begins with Scripture because it is God's Word. It gives us the guidance we need (especially when we are just beginning) to learn how to listen. It gives us something outside of ourselves to focus on and reminds us that we don't accomplish prayer on our own. Praying with Scripture helps us pray constantly by embedding in our hearts and minds a “vocabulary of prayer”—in becoming more familiar with Scripture and how it applies to us specifically, we are more readily able to call it to mind in various situations, which in turn calls us to prayer.



DAY 5 – TRUTH AND BEAUTY

Participants will reflect on Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well, Byzantine Mosaic, Basilica of San Marco, Venice, Italy.

Rather than presenting us with a single scene, the mosaic is divided into two parts, providing a pictorial narrative. Recall John 4:1-43. What two events are depicted in the mosaic?

The left side of the mosaic depicts Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, including when the Apostles return and unexpectedly find him talking with a woman. The right side of the mosaic recalls how the Samaritan woman goes back to share with her townsfolk the encounter she has had, and to proclaim “the Christ.”

