

FOCUS ON GOD

by The Rev. Dr. Michael Green

Here are some suggestions to prompt you. They are not exhaustive!

1) Use hymns or modern songs

a) *Sing (unaccompanied or with an instrument if available)* Borrow a hymn book and type out the words – and Randi Wood has some song books with a variety of hymns (not in church book) and songs

b) *Listen to a CD with hymn or song*

Either of these can be followed by led or open prayer that picks up phrases from the hymn/song

2) Read a psalm or other bit of worship from Scripture

a) e.g. Psalms 95, 100, 150, 19, 105, 103, 98, 93 and let them lead you into prayer based on the psalm. If you want to read it together, ensure you have the same version (or type out).

You can personalise a psalm into a prayer e.g. type out Psalm 95 as ‘We come before you with thanksgiving and extol you with music and song. For you Lord are the great God... In your hand are all the corners of the earth... ‘ etc

b) ‘Be there’ in heaven with Rev. 4, 5 or with Isaiah’s vision in Is. 6:1-8; join Moses and the Israelites in their song of triumph in Exodus 15

c) Use a passage that focuses on the person of Christ e.g. Col. 1:15-20 or Rev. 1:12-18

3) **Choose a theme from scripture** that focuses on God the Father or on the person of Christ e.g. creator, shepherd, light, life, names of Jesus. This can be pre-prepared or ask for contributions round the room.

Example of a prepared theme: God is my rock. Hand out slips of paper with different references to be read out. I used either a concordance or cross-references to find these verses; Deuteronomy 32:3,4; 1 Samuel 2:1,2; 2 Samuel 22:1-3; 2 Samuel 22:31-33; Psalm 19:14; Psalm 78:35; Psalm 144:1,2; Isaiah 26:3,4; Isaiah 44:8; Psalm 40:1-3

You could follow this by singing the song *Ascribe greatness to our God, the Rock* (taken from Deut. 32:3,4) or the hymn *Rock of Ages*

Example of asking for contributions round the room: Have a large candle, lit, in the centre. Ask people to say/read out verses from the Bible about light. (You might need to give a few minutes before you start to give a chance to find verses – or give warning at the previous meeting.)

4) Use a picture or ornament (or other object)

Ask God to show us how it can remind us of him. Meditate in silence for a few minutes; then let people offer prayers of thanks and praise. e.g. a sunset, pictures of children, stork with uplifted beak. (You might call this an advanced tool - not for a new group.)

PRAYING TOGETHER

I believe that praying together is one of the strongest forces for binding Christians together. So do all you can to help even the reluctant ones in your group to start praying aloud (even if they think they can't!)

*Suggest that in their private prayer they sometimes pray aloud. This helps them to put prayers into words and get used to the sound of their own voices praying.

*Encourage and model short prayers

*Suggest that no one prays for more than one item at a time – but each person can pray more than once. (An opening prayer that prays all round the world can kill group prayer!)

*Do not think that because one person has prayed for a need that there is nothing else left to pray for that need. Explain this, and demonstrate it.

*Sometimes use set prayers e.g. from prayer book.

*'The Grace' from 2 Corinthians 13:14 said corporately makes a good ending to a time of prayer. When people know it by heart encourage saying it with eyes and smiles open, looking round at one another (good for bonding!)

*Draw up an empty chair. "You have been talking freely to the rest of us. Now imagine Jesus is sitting in that chair and talk to him."

PRAYING IN SCRIPTURE

*A gardener needs to water seeds after they are planted if they are going to germinate.

Prayer enables the Holy Spirit to 'water' the seed of the Word so that it germinates and bears fruit in our lives.

**After the Bible study, pray with Bibles open.* We too often separate Bible reading and prayer – we tend to finish our Bible study, shut our Bibles, and then turn to prayer.

**Encourage short prayers to make it easy for those unused to praying aloud. Suggest a prayer as simple as "Verse 4. Lord, I want that to be true for me."*

**Don't be afraid of having more than one prayer round the same verse.*

ENABLING TRUST IN SHARING PERSONAL NEEDS AND SUPPORTIVE PRAYER

*Include thanksgiving as well as requests for prayer.

*Vary the way a time of sharing and prayer for one another is introduced. How have the last two weeks been for you? What answers to prayer have you seen recently? Who has been excited by something in your personal Bible reading?

*Model vulnerability in talking about your own requests for prayer

*Occasionally split the group into 2/3s to talk and pray together. This can give a 'safer' environment than in the whole group. Be firm about making people move from talk into prayer.

**One possibility* is to have circulating prayer partnerships. People can arrange to meet outside the regular group meeting time.