



DISCUSSION GUIDE

PRAYER FASTING AND THE PURSUIT OF GOD

with David Platt

SECRET
CHURCH

KNOW HIS WORD. KNOW HIS PERSECUTED.

19

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Printed in the United States of America.

Published by Radical, Inc.

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Using This Discussion Guide

The goal of Secret Church is not simply to listen but to understand and apply the truths of God's Word. One way we do this is by discussing the truths we have learned with others. For each section of this Secret Church study, we've provided questions to reflect on and discuss.

Only the group leader will need this Discussion Guide. The rest of the group should have the following items:

- A Bible
- A Secret Church 19 Study Guide
- Access to David Platt's teaching in Secret Church 19

The Secret Church 19 Study Guide and David Platt's teaching may be accessed for free at radical.net/sc19. For more resources on the topic of prayer, fasting, and the pursuit of God, see the list of recommended resources on p. 250 of the Secret Church 19 Study Guide.

SESSION 1: Introduction

Session 1 introduces the topic of prayer, fasting, and the pursuit of God by defining these terms and concepts and by identifying ways in which they have been misunderstood or ignored.

1. Many Christians know that they *should* pray regularly, yet they find it difficult to pray on a consistent basis. Why do you think this is?
2. Why do you think prayer plays such a small role in the weekly gathering of many churches?
3. Fasting seems to be ignored by many Christians and churches. What are some possible reasons this topic is often neglected?
4. Why is fasting so intimidating for most people, including many Christians?
5. Pursuing God should be our primary aim in life. What other pursuits tend to hinder us from this all-important goal? Why do you think so many churches get distracted from pursuing God as their primary aim?

SESSION 2: The Pentateuch

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy

Session 2 covers the first five books of the Bible, which are known as the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch lays the foundation for Scripture's teaching about the nature of God, man, sin, and salvation. These foundational truths are critical for understanding what Scripture teaches about prayer, fasting, and the pursuit of God.

The Pentateuch is also important for helping us understand the storyline of Scripture, beginning with God's original design in creation, man's fall into sin, and God's plan of redemption. In this first session we'll see how prayer and fasting figure into God's dealings with the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and then with Moses and Israel.

1. The opening chapters of the Bible are foundational for understanding the nature of God, man, sin, and salvation. What's the relationship between these truths and Scripture's teaching on prayer, fasting, and the pursuit of God? (See #1, Genesis 1–4)
2. Why is it so important to grasp the truth that it is God who first pursues us (rather than the other way around)? (See #1, Genesis 1–4)
3. How does it skew prayer to seek God's gifts rather than God Himself? (See #2, Genesis 12, 15, 17)
4. How do God's attributes, such as immutability (unchangeableness), sovereignty, and self-sufficiency, give us confidence in prayer? (See #7, Exodus 3, 6)
5. Does the fact that God's purposes are unchanging mean that our prayers don't matter? Explain your answer. (See #9, Exodus 32)

6. As Christians, we give thanks that God has saved us. But why did He save us? (See #12, Exodus 40)
7. What do the sacrifices in Leviticus have to teach us about how sinful people can approach a holy God? (See #13, Leviticus)
8. What are some needs in your own family, church, and community that you can intercede for? What about urgent spiritual and physical needs around the world? (See #15, Numbers 11, 12, 14, 21)
9. Why must love of God be the supreme motivation in our praying and fasting? What are some common unbiblical motivations for praying and fasting? (See #16, Deuteronomy)
10. If we're honest, we often do not feel the need to pray. What does this reveal about the way we view ourselves? What does it reveal about our view of God?

SESSION 3: The Historical Books

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings,
1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

The Historical Books are the focus of Session 3. God continues to fulfill His redemptive purposes for His people—purposes that were originally laid out in the covenants made with Abraham and then, through Moses, with Israel.

In the Historical Books, we see the people of God, particularly Israel's leaders, pleading with God to fulfill His promises. Leaders like Joshua and David relied on God for His grace, protection, and provision. Sadly, though, Israel and its leaders often failed to look to God for wisdom, and they failed to love Him supremely. Although God's people entered the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership, God eventually expelled them from the land due to their sin. They needed to repent and seek God's face through prayer and fasting.

1. What role does prayer play in terms of exposing sin? In what ways has this played out in your own life? (See #18, Joshua 7)
2. When faced with a decision that is important or difficult, many people ask God to show them a "sign." How can the desire for a sign be an expression of unbelief? What are some helpful steps when it comes to making wise decisions? (See #21, Judges 6)
3. How does praying according to God's promises give us confidence in prayer? What are some specific promises you might pray in light of decisions, fears, etc., in your own life? Make a list. (See #25, 2 Samuel 7)
4. Unfortunately, we often use prayer as a final, desperate attempt to get God's help. How is Solomon's prayer for wisdom in 1 Kings 3 a sign of humility? In what areas of your life are you depending on your own wisdom rather than God's? (See #26, 1 Kings 3)

5. Why is it important that our prayers be filled with praise and thanksgiving? What's the danger of only bringing our needs and requests to God while failing to ascribe praise to Him? (See #27, 1 Kings 8)
6. Though we talk a lot about God's power, how is prayer a litmus test for what we really believe about God's power? (See #28, 1 Kings 17–19)
7. What's the danger in not recognizing that we are in a spiritual war? What role should prayer play in this conflict? (See #29, 2 Kings 6)
8. Praying and fasting are right responses when we are faced with a situation that is overwhelming or perplexing. What attributes of God can we appeal to in our need? (See #36, 2 Chronicles 20)
9. Esther fasts in light of urgent need, in face of real fear, for the salvation of people, and for the glory of God. For which of these purposes might fasting be an appropriate response right now in your own life? (See #40, Esther, Part 3)
10. The world's opposition to our obedience and our witness to the gospel can be intimidating. How can prayer change our perspective of power in this world? (See #58, Nehemiah 2)

SESSION 4: Wisdom Literature

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

Session 4 explores the books that are sometimes referred to as the Wisdom Literature of the Bible. Unlike the previous books of the Old Testament, which are largely narrative, these books reveal God's truth in a form that is predominantly poetic.

Wisdom Literature covers the range of human emotions, experiences, and questions, teaching us what it means to live in the fear of the Lord in every circumstance. We learn what it means to praise and pursue God in the midst of a broken, sinful world. The psalms, in particular, provide us with a rich variety of ways to express our praise, thanksgiving, confession, lament, and confidence in the Lord.

1. What does Job's example teach us about how we should approach God in the midst of our suffering? (See #47–50, Job)
2. What do the psalms have to teach us when it comes to praying in the midst of grief, loss, false accusations, and a sense of alienation? How can we express our griefs to God without sinning? (See #51–53, Psalms)
3. How can the psalms lead us to pursue the Giver (God) and not just His gifts? What evidences from Scripture do we see of God's faithfulness? How has His faithfulness been demonstrated in your own life? (See #54, Psalms)
4. What role should confession of sin play in the life of the Christian? What about the church's weekly gathering? What does a failure to confess sin say about the way we view God and ourselves? (See #57, Psalms)
5. How do the psalms help us to pray in light of injustice in the world? (See #60, Psalms)

6. What do the psalms as a whole have to teach us about the character of God? (See Psalms)
7. What do the psalms as a whole have to teach us about God's desire to commune with His people? (See Psalms)
8. Should non-Christians have confidence that God will answer their prayers? Explain your answer. (See #61, Proverbs)
9. While we should pray continually and about all things, how can we guard against approaching God irreverently or flippantly? (See #62, Ecclesiastes)
10. How does the book of Song of Solomon help us see that pursuing God is not merely a duty to be performed? (See #63, Song of Solomon)

SESSION 5: The Prophets

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea,
Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk,
Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

In Session 5 we consider the books known as the Prophets. These books contain the messages of those who spoke for God and held His people accountable to the covenant that God made with them through Moses. The Prophets warn of God's coming judgment against those who violate His covenant, but they also point to a new day of salvation that God will bring about for His people.

The Prophets remind us of the holiness of God and the seriousness of sin. They call God's people to repentance, which often involves prayers of confession and fasting. These books look expectantly to a coming Messiah, whom we know as Jesus, who would rescue His people from sin and bring about the fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes for the world.

1. What does it say about our pursuit of God if we are full of pride? Why should the pursuit of God humble us? (See #64, Isaiah 6)
2. Why is fasting in and of itself not sufficient in terms of pleasing the Lord? What kind of actions should "true fasting" lead to in our lives? (See #66, Isaiah 58)
3. Under the old covenant that God made with Israel, many Israelites rejected God by ignoring and disobeying His commands. What is it about the new covenant that guarantees that all of God's people will desire to obey Him? (See #68, Jeremiah)
4. Is it wrong to be honest with God in the midst of deep pain and grief? How can we do this in a way that honors the Lord? (See #69, Lamentations)
5. For what overarching purpose does God do all that He does? How should this one purpose affect the purpose for our lives? (See #70, Ezekiel)

6. What place should contrition and brokenness have in our prayer and fasting? Why do you think there is so little contrition in many of our prayers? (See #71, Daniel)
7. How should God's final judgment lead us to pray and fast? (See #72, Joel)
8. Biblical repentance is more than simply saying that you're sorry and then continuing with the same beliefs, thoughts, and actions. What should biblical repentance look like in a person's life? Give a specific example. (See #73–74, Amos and Jonah)
9. How can we have hope when God doesn't seem to be answering our prayers or when His ways don't make sense? (See #75, Habakkuk)
10. How can fasting lead to joy in God? (See #76, Zechariah)

SESSION 6: The Gospels

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

Session 6 explores the accounts of the four Gospels. In these books, we see the One to whom the entire Old Testament was pointing—Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus secures the salvation of His people and teaches them what it means to be a citizen of His kingdom.

Through Jesus' teaching and example, we understand that prayer, fasting, and the pursuit of God are central to Christian discipleship. In a passage known as "The Lord's Prayer" (Matthew 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4), Jesus gives us a kind of template, or pattern, for how to pray, and it's a pattern that He embodied in His own life and death. The One who taught us to ask that God's will might be done on earth submitted to His Father's will at the cost of His own life.

1. What can we learn from the way Jesus resisted the temptations of Satan in the wilderness? (See #78, Matthew 4)
2. What is so significant about the fact that Christians are invited to call on God as their "Father"? (See #79, Matthew 6 and Luke 11)
3. Why is it important that we see prayer as a way to grow in our relationship with God rather than simply a way to get our wishes fulfilled? What are some signs that your prayers lack this God-centered perspective? (See #79, Matthew 6 and Luke 11)
4. How can the request "Hallowed be your name" help us to know what to pray for? (See #79, Matthew 6 and Luke 11)
5. What role should prayer play in the church's mission of making disciples of all nations? Why do you think many Christians don't see prayer as indispensable to the church's mission? (See #81, Matthew 9)

6. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God with all that we are. How should this command affect the way disciples pursue God? (See #84, Matthew 22)
7. Jesus taught us to pray in faith. Does that mean that we should not pray if we are struggling with unbelief? Explain your answer. (See #85, Mark 9)
8. Give some examples from the life and teaching of Jesus that demonstrate the importance of prayer. (See #87, Luke)
9. Why is it so crucial that we persevere in prayer, even when it seems as if God is not listening? Make a list of biblical truths—God's attributes and promises—you can meditate on in order to help you persevere in prayer. (See #89, Luke 18)
10. Prior to His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus prayed and submitted Himself to His Father's will (Matthew 26:36–46). What role did Jesus' submission play in our salvation?

SESSION 7: Acts

Session 7 covers the book of Acts, a Spirit-inspired account of the spread of the gospel through the apostles and the early church. Acts records how the risen Christ continued to build His church through the power of His Spirit as His people proclaimed His Word.

Prayer is closely tied to the church's mission throughout the book of Acts, as God's people look to Him for boldness, guidance, protection, etc. Relying on the Spirit's power, the church fasted and prayed, and the gospel spread from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. The book of Acts should give the church confidence today as it seeks to carry out God's mission in His strength and for His glory.

1. What role did prayer play in the spread of the gospel through the early church? (See #95, Acts)
2. Many churches spend a lot of time and resources on creative strategies, events, etc., but very little time in prayer. What does this say about our faith in God's power?
3. Just as the early church faced opposition for confessing Christ, so many Christians around the world face persecution today. How should we pray for them? What are some practical ways we can remember to pray for them? (See #96, Acts 4; #99, Acts 12)
4. How does fasting help us prioritize and pursue God's purposes (rather than our own) in the world? (See #100, Acts 13)
5. Make a list of ways that your church can pray for its missionaries. (See #101, Acts 13–14)

6. Sometimes fasting is only seen as a discipline used for an individual's spiritual growth. What purpose did fasting serve in the early church? (See #102, Acts 14)
7. How can we know God's will today, and what role should other Christians play in our decision-making process? (See #103–104; Acts 16, 20–21)
8. While we should pray and be open to the Lord's leading, why shouldn't we wait on an audible voice from God in order to obey His Word? (See #103–104; Acts 16, 20–21)
9. Why must the glory of God motivate the church's obedience to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20)?
10. What does God's work of salvation in the book of Acts have to teach us about our missions strategies today? List some takeaways.

SESSION 8: Letters From Paul

Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians,
Philippians, Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy,
Titus, Philemon

In Session 8 we look at the letters of Paul, the apostle God called to proclaim the gospel among the Gentiles. Paul's Spirit-inspired letters include not only his teaching about prayer but also his own prayers for the churches to whom he wrote. He urged these churches to pursue God's glory in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—both in terms of their own spiritual growth and for the sake of the spread of the gospel message.

1. What role does the Holy Spirit play in our prayers? How does He, the Spirit, help us when we don't know what to pray?
(See #105, Romans 8)
2. What does it mean to pray "without ceasing," and how is this different from walking around all day speaking to God out loud?
(See #106, Unceasing Prayer)
3. Paul prays that the spiritual eyes of the believers in Ephesus might be opened. What does this teach us about God's role in our spiritual growth? (See #107, Eph 1)
4. Paul says that God is "able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think ..." How should this affect the way we pray?
(See #108, Eph 3)
5. Respond to the following statement: "We should only pray for those in our culture who are faithful to Christ." (See #111, 1 Timothy 2)
6. What role do our prayers play in the spread of the gospel to all nations? (See #111, 1 Timothy 2)

7. How important is prayer when it comes to spiritual warfare? What does the need for prayer tell us about our dependence on God? (See #114, Prayers for the Growth of the Church)
8. What are some common themes that run through Paul's prayers for the churches?
9. What is different about the things Paul emphasizes in prayer in comparison to the way you pray? How are Paul's prayers like (or unlike) the prayers you hear in church?
10. Make a list of requests that you can regularly ask God for on behalf of other members of your own local church.

SESSION 9: Letters From Others

Hebrews, James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Revelation

The final session, Session 9, covers the remaining letters of the Bible (those not written by the apostle Paul). These letters teach us, among other things, about Christ's role as our high priest, the role of prayer in trials and suffering, and the role of prayer in the unfolding of God's redemptive purposes. In the final book of the Bible, Revelation, we see the culmination of our redemption in the new creation. Our fasting will turn to feasting as we experience fellowship with God for all of eternity.

1. What makes Christ the perfect high priest, and how does this reality give us confidence in prayer? (See #116, Hebrews 4)
2. How is our prayer life an indicator of whether or not we truly trust God? (See #117, Hebrews 10–11)
3. What role does prayer play in the midst of our trials? (See #118, James 1)
4. God sometimes uses prayer to heal the sick. Does this mean that we've done something wrong if an illness persists or ends in the death of a friend or loved one? If not, why not? (See #119, James 5)
5. According to 1 Peter 3:7, how does a husband's relationship to his wife affect his prayer life? Does this mean that we "earn" answers to our prayers through our obedience? Explain your answer. (See #120, 1 Peter 3)
6. First Peter 5:6–7 says that we are to humble ourselves by casting our anxieties on God. How is it a sign of humility to bring our requests to God in prayer? (See #121, 1 Peter 5)

7. How does walking according to God's will affect the things we pray for? (See #122, 1 John 5)
8. What role does prayer play in the unfolding of God's purposes in the world? (See #124, Revelation 8)
9. What, according to Revelation 21–22, is the culmination of our pursuit of God? (See #125, Revelation 21–22)
10. How does a right view of our future reward help fuel prayer and fasting in the present?

Concluding Applications

God's Word is not simply there to inform us but to shape and transform us. Based on the truths covered in this study, consider the following application questions.

1. How will you be intentional about growing in your consistency in prayer? Set a regular time for daily prayer that fits with your schedule.
2. How are your prayers lacking in terms of the different kinds of biblical prayers covered in this study? (ex: confession, lament, praise, etc.) Make a plan to incorporate these types of prayers on a regular basis.
3. If you are medically able, plan a time to fast from food. If you have never fasted, or if you rarely fast, begin by fasting from a single meal in the upcoming month. If you have fasted regularly or semi-regularly in the past, choose an entire day to fast from food. Plan ahead by selecting Scriptures and prayer emphases to focus on during your fast.
4. Make a list of the things that take up most of your time, money, and energy. Which of these are keeping you from pursuing God wholeheartedly? Which ones need to be redirected so that you may "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness . . ." (Matthew 6:33)? Pray about how God would have you leverage your life for the sake of His glory and the spread of His gospel.
5. Make a plan to pray weekly for unreached people groups and for the persecuted church. Visit opendoorsusa.org to learn more about how you can pray for the persecuted church. Visit peoplegroups.org or joshuaproject.net to learn more about unreached people groups.

WE WERE CREATED TO KNOW AND ENJOY GOD, AND TO DEPEND ON HIM FOR OUR EVERY NEED.

God has designed prayer and fasting for His glory and for our good. So let your life be an all-consuming quest to know, enjoy, worship, and love Him.

We were created to know and enjoy God, and to depend on Him for our every need. Sadly, though, we often look to the things of this world to satisfy us, and we are constantly tempted to rely on ourselves rather than on God's wisdom and power.

In Secret Church 19, we'll see that all of Scripture invites us to pursue God, and we'll see how crucial the role of prayer and fasting is in this pursuit. Beginning in Genesis and moving all the way through Revelation, David Platt shows us that God has designed prayer and fasting not only to meet our daily needs but more importantly so that we might find greater intimacy and satisfaction in Him. We'll also see the critical role of prayer and fasting in carrying out the mission Christ gave to His church—to make disciples of all nations.

Other questions covered in this study include . . .

- How does prayer work?
- What does biblical fasting look like?
- Why pray if God knows what I need and what will happen in the future?
- What do I do when it feels like I'm praying into thin air?
- How do I know what God is leading me to do with my life?

**GOD HAS DESIGNED PRAYER AND FASTING FOR HIS GLORY
AND FOR OUR GOOD. SO LET YOUR LIFE BE AN ALL-CONSUMING
QUEST TO KNOW, ENJOY, WORSHIP, AND LOVE HIM.**

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