

By Dick Moes

Part 2: How Christians Grow—Learning to Pray

In Part one of the *Emmaus* Nurture course, we looked at what Christians believe. In Part two, we will look at how Christians grow. Part two is made up of four lessons: (1) Learning to pray, (2) Reading the Bible, (3) Belonging to the church and (4) Celebrating the Lord's Supper.

The parable of the sower

The first lesson of part two begins the parable of the sower. As the parable of the lost son was fundamental to the first part of this course in that it showed that people need God in their lives, so the parable of the sower is basic to part two. It shows people the need to grow as Christians. Read the parable together as a group. Then, break into small groups and have the groups discuss what kind of a person best corresponds to each kind of soil. As the groups come back together, have them share their findings. Go through the different kinds of soil together with the group. Warn the people that they will go through times of testing and that they will experience thorns growing up to choke the life out of the seed. Give the people some kind of an idea of how long it may take the seed to grow to maturity.

The Lord's Prayer

Have the people talk together in small groups about their own experience of prayer. Be sure to allow the people to articulate a wide range of experiences. Let the groups share their experiences with the whole group. Then, introduce the Lord's Prayer. Guide the group through the structure of this prayer, briefly commenting on the address, the petitions, the doxology and the Amen.

Developing good habits of prayer

Have the people talk together about the different reasons why it is healthy and important for Christians to develop good habits of prayer—and what some of the difficulties might be. Be sure to mention that:

- Prayer builds our relationship with God. Like any relationship, our relationship with God will develop and grow as we spend quality time on building the relationship.
- Prayer was a vital part of Jesus' own ministry. Thus, it should also be a vital part of our life.
- We grow more like the Lord Jesus as we spend more time with Him.
- Prayer strengthens us for our daily lives.

- Through prayer God's power is released in the world, in the church and in our own lives.

Some first steps

Stress that it is good to talk to God (and listen to Him) all through the day. Most Christians, however, find it very important to have a time each day to spend with God in prayer. Emphasize that it can be hard to find such a time because of our own hectic schedule, our laziness and the activity of the devil. Highlight that in order to establish a daily time of prayer, a person should find the time, the place and plan the time. Be sure to point out that there is no single, 'right' way that suits everyone. Whatever suits a person best is usually the best way for that person. Also be flexible when speaking about the components of a person's prayer time. One way that people have found helpful is to first prepare for prayer through praise, confession and stillness. Second, they listen to God through attending to the Scriptures. Third, they talk to God about their own concerns, the concerns of those who are close to them and the concerns of the world. Have the groups discuss together the importance of each part of their prayer time.

Praying with others

Explain why praying with others is important. Point out that this can be difficult at first. Tell the people not to worry about how other people pray. Encourage them to be natural and to persevere. Remind them of what God tells us in Romans 8:26 that the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know what we ought to pray for. Thus the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

Ask the people to reflect on how they might develop a helpful pattern of prayer. Encourage them to try to learn the Lord's Prayer by heart and to pray it slowly each day, thinking carefully about the words. Entertain any questions the people may have at this time.

If you would like to view the outline for this lesson, go to www.reformedevangelism.com and follow the links. We have added two classics on prayer to our library section. The first is J.C. Ryle's little booklet *A Call to Prayer*. The second is Andrew Murray's *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. Murray's book contains no fewer than 31 chapters on various aspects of prayer. Read one chapter at a time and have your prayer life formed by this classic. Next time, we hope to introduce "Reading the Bible."