

LOOKING Upward

Helping your group
develop a supernatural
relationship with God

A book of cell agendas by David Finnell

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10055 Regal Row, Suite 180
Houston, Texas 77040 USA
(713) 896-7478 • Fax (713) 896-1874

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Introduction

For many years, I taught a seminary course on cell groups. Each class modeled a cell group. We became vulnerable to one another as we shared our fears and concerns in the daunting task of reaching other people. Every class I taught experienced people coming to faith in Christ. The Spirit used these experiences to teach something unique to each class.

There were many supernatural experiences in those cell classes. One student was absolutely convinced that he could not do the outside assignment. Ed was supposed to work through the network of relationships that God had given him in life. Since this student lived on campus, there were no natural opportunities for interacting with unbelievers. The class gathered around Ed and prayed that the Lord would open a door for him during the coming week.

Later that week, Ed was walking down the street in the center of town. A man walked up to him and said, "OK, what do I have to do to get saved?" Ed was absolutely dumfounded. He took the man into a nearby cafe to talk. He shared the plan of salvation and the man impatiently agreed with everything.

Still in a daze, Ed asked, "With all the people walking up and down this street, why did you choose me to ask such a question?" The man explained that he had come from another city to visit his mom in the hospital. Everything was falling apart in his life. His wife had left him, his mom was dying, and he had lost his job. After visiting his mom, he was walking down the street and became absolutely desperate. He audibly cried out to God, "If you are real, please help me. What am I supposed to do?" Then he heard a clear voice say, "See that man walking down the street? Ask him. He'll tell you what you need to do."

Can you envision your cell experiencing the supernatural hand of God at work through them? This agenda book was written in order to provide some general guidelines to enable your cell to experience this kind of walk with God. Not that this book has anything new to offer—it only leads you to line up your lives with the Word of God. When we abandon our own agendas and line up with God, we can rest assured that we will encounter truth and fruit. There is another common term that many people use to describe this kind of intimacy with the person of God. That word is prayer.

In these six sessions, we will redefine many common conceptions of prayer. Prayer can best be described as intimacy with the person of God. Yet many of us seldom experience this level of communion because of the many obstacles we face. We hope to help you define these obstacles and begin the journey to remove them. As they are removed, you will find yourself moving closer in your walk with Him. As you learn to commune with God and one another, He will begin to guide and source your prayers. As you begin to pray according to His specific desires, you will begin to see Him move in mysterious ways. You will enter into battle with the Lord at your side. As you learn to hear His voice and walk in a constant awareness of His presence, you will begin to see fruit. You will walk with God and He will literally make His home with you.

— David Finnell

How To Use This Book

The devotionals

Each lesson begins with a personal devotional for you, the cell leader. The best way to use this devotional is to meditate on it each day between your meetings. For example, if your group meets on Thursday evenings, use the next week's devotional to begin your daily time with God on Friday morning, meditating on the scripture each day until the next Thursday. Ask God how the truths discovered in the scripture and devotional should shape how you facilitate the meeting and work with your group members one on one.

The agendas

The agendas are organized around four W's, which are *Welcome, Worship, Word and Witness*. These four areas are designed to help your group experience Christ's presence, embrace His power, and understand His purposes for your lives to the point of practical application.

- **Welcome:** A light "icebreaker" question to get your group members involved in the weekly meeting.
- **Worship:** Practical ways for your group to enter into Christ's presence.
- **Word:** Applying God's Word to your everyday lives that results in member-to-member ministry in and out of your meetings.
- **Witness:** "Putting feet" on what you've discussed so your group can live Christ's purposes for your lives.

The leader's notes and tip boxes

We've included helpful tip boxes and author's notes under many of the discussion questions to help you understand their meaning. Read through the lesson a few times in the days before your meeting to grasp the direction and outcome of each agenda. Use the notes and tips to prepare, but don't read them aloud during your meeting. They have been placed within the agenda to help you become a better facilitator.

The questions in the Word portions

Each numbered question in this portion of the agenda has been written so you can simply read them to your group. Or, you can write each question

on a slip of paper and distribute them to various members of your group to read aloud to involve the group more. We suggest that you keep the last questions in each lesson for yourself as the main facilitator because these are usually ministry questions that require follow up.

The “Between the Meetings” options

Because healthy cell life is more than a once-a-week meeting, it will be important for you to look over these ideas, possibly share them with your group, and then determine which option or options will help your group grow.

If you find implementation to be especially challenging, remember these practical things are what make cell life so powerful and different from other kinds of small groups you may have led before. Work as hard at your “between the meeting” activities as you do preparing for your weekly meeting and you’ll see growth in yourself and your group.

The scripture verses

Each lesson ends with a scripture verse, which we highly recommend your group memorize. There’s nothing like scripture memory to keep your mind on glorifying God! Feel free to copy this verse and pass it out to everyone as your members walk out the door after each meeting. To make it fun, offer a small prize (a candy bar, etc.) for the first person who can recite the verse to you when you next meet. When you celebrate scripture memory, everyone will join in.

The last pages of this book

At the back of this book you’ll find an appendix with each week’s scripture verse. We’ve added these pages to make it easy to duplicate the verses.

This is one area of cell life that you can easily delegate. Ask a member to duplicate the scripture verses and distribute them for you for the next six weeks after the meetings conclude.

Do you have more questions?

If these instructions leave you with more questions, ask your coach or pastor! They are ready and willing to help you succeed in cell life and leadership.

Your Devotional

Many people pray as if they are calling God on the telephone or getting 'on-line'. We get on-line by closing our eyes and dialing up the special code "Dear Heavenly Father." We tell Him what we want, and then get off-line by saying "In Jesus name, Amen." Then we disconnect from the spiritual world and open our eyes. While God considers our heart more than our actions, I believe He is saddened by this kind of prayer because it is mechanical and mostly repetitive (Matthew 6:7).

Some people view prayer as having God available whenever they want Him. How would you feel if your spouse made you walk ten feet behind you where ever you went? If your spouse needed something from you, they would call you forward, give you a command, and then send you off to fulfill their request. Upon your return, you would be sent back to your place, ten feet to the rear. It would be as if you did not exist, except when you were needed. Most people would never tolerate such a situation, yet many Christians treat God this way.

Other people may use prayer to manipulate God or to get themselves out of a difficult situation. They do not live out their lives acknowledging the constant presence of God with them. Whenever they have a need, they simply give God their request, and then move on with their lives. This kind of relationship with God does not please Him. How can our Creator tolerate such denigrating behavior?

How do you relate to God in your daily life? Does this passage describe your intimacy with the person of God?

Jesus answered and said to him, *"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."* (John 14:23)

During your times with God this week, ask Him in what areas of your life you may be keeping Him at a distance, and how you can more fully abide with Him.

This Week

The Objective

This lesson is designed to help the members of your group:

1. Redefine their perceptions about prayer.
2. Increase their intimacy with the person of God.
3. Pray without ceasing.

The Point

Many believers see prayer as getting online with God. God lives up there somewhere and we communicate with Him by sending spiritual e-mails. You send an e-mail to God when you want something. This concept misses the whole point of prayer. Communication with God in Scripture is more like an intimate relationship. Intimacy with God involves our constant awareness of His presence. Through intimacy with God, we fellowship together in one another's presence. We work together to accomplish His purpose of redemption.

Preparation

1. If you choose Option #1 in *Between the Meeting Options*, make enough photocopies of the diary in Appendix A for each member of your group.
2. Photocopy the memory Scripture of the Week in Appendix B. Cut into strips to distribute to each group member.
3. Prepare yourself for this session by increasing your awareness of the constant presence of God throughout the coming week. Take several sticky notes and write the word "NOW" on them. Place these in conspicuous places where you walk everyday at work, in your car and at home. Each time you see the note, acknowledge God's presence with you in some meaningful way.
4. Pray specifically for each member of your group to hear God's voice during the upcoming meeting and touch him or her in a special way. Petition God to move powerfully during the meeting and bring your group to a new level of intimacy with Him and each other.

The Agenda

Welcome

Ice breaker activity: 15-20 minutes.

Ask each person to respond to the following question: "Suppose you have been given an Aladdin's Lamp. The genie in the lamp will give you anything you want if you are very specific. The genie prefers to grant outlandish wishes. What would you like?"

Tip:

Locate an Alladin-type oil lamp and pass it around the group as they respond to the question.

When everyone has answered, ask the group to determine what percentage of the questions were for personal request verses being focused on others.

Worship

Enter into a time of worship and praise. Work to create an awareness of God's presence with your group by purposefully praying between songs and formally welcoming Him into your presence.

Tip:

Sing songs that address God in the first person. To help the group's awareness of His literal presence, place an empty chair in the middle of the room.

Week 1: Redefining Prayer

Word

Ask someone to read John 17:20-22:

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one (John 17:20-22).”

1. Based upon this passage, what kind of relationship does God want us to have with Him and with one another? How does this relate to prayer?

We should live in an intimate relationship with God and one another that results in other people coming to know Jesus. This passage also suggests what many would call a radical level of intimacy with those in your cell group.

Prayer is intimacy with the person of God. God concerns Himself more with our intimacy than our petitions. He knows our needs before we even ask (Matthew 6:8). Our intimacy with Him and His Word (John 15:7) leads us to a knowledge of what He wants to do through us. Then as we pray according to His will, God unleashes His power. Intimate prayer nurtures a love relationship where you live out your life in the constant presence of the One whom you love the most. You talk with Him and He talks with you about everything. Paul describes this as prayer without ceasing.

2. What percentage of each day represents the duration of God’s literal presence with you?

We are never out of His presence (Psalm 139:3; Matthew 28:20, John 14:23).

Tip:

The first four questions are “one answer” questions. While foundational for ministry, you don’t need to spend too much time discussing answers to these questions.

3. What part of your life does not interest God?

If the hairs on our head are numbered (Matthew 10:30), then we should assume that He cares about everything we do. What we eat, wear, say and do are objects of God’s interest in our lives.

4. How should we respond to His continual presence with us?

We can talk with God all the time. When we drive, we can talk with God since He is right there with us. We can ask Him what to do throughout the day. While there are formal times when we should enter into our “prayer closet,” we should live out our whole lives in fellowship with Him. Such prayer leads to a lifestyle of intimate relationship (Revelation 3:20).

Your Ministry Questions

5. Can someone share a time in the last few months when you did not feel “one” with God? What was the root issue and what effect did it have on your time investment with other believers?

6. Would anyone like to be prayed for right now concerning your relationship with God and a distance you feel you have with Him?

Tip:

Expect a period of silence after you ask these questions. Allow this “pregnant pause” to birth transparent sharing. Try not to break the silence yourself.

If any unbelievers are present and you feel the Holy Spirit’s leading to do so, ask them if they have ever established a relationship with God through Jesus’ death on the cross. If they have not, invite them to do so right now. For believers in your group who need ministry, ask one or two members to gather around them and pray for them—motivate your members to minister to one another (versus looking to you each week).

Witness:

Ask someone to read Ephesians 6:18-19, which describes praying without ceasing.

Pose this question to your group for discussion:

1. In what practical ways can we apply what we’ve learned here to the opportunities we will have this week when we spend time with each other and unbelievers? How should we hold each other accountable to do these things?

Week 1: Redefining Prayer

Close this meeting with a prayer over your group, asking God to remind each person of His presence at various times during the days that follow. In addition, ask God to present special moments with unbelievers where each group member will clearly hear God's prompting to share about His love and goodness.

Between the Meeting Options

Choose one for or with your group and discuss the best way to report the results back to the group.

Option #1

Each member will keep a diary for a full day during the next week to monitor your awareness of the Lord's constant presence with you. During the selected day, communicate with the Lord at least once each hour. This may be praise, a question for specific guidance, a petition, or simply asking Him what He would like you to do at that moment. In some way, check off each hour that you have made some form of communication. You may want to make a note of anything special you have learned.

Option #2

Challenge your members to select one day during the coming week to spend the whole day (or portion of the day) with the Lord. During your outing, try to spend the whole time with an awareness of His presence with you. Do not close your eyes or bow your head. Go somewhere and do something with a constant awareness of His presence. Talk with Him. Share your heart with Him. Listen for any way in which He would speak to you whether you hear anything or not.

Week 1: Redefining Prayer

Option #3

Divide the group into pairs. Ask the pairs to pray for one another during the week according to Colossians 4:26:

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Each pair should communicate with each other at least twice during the week to pray together. As your members pray, ask them to share any new prayer requests or any answers to prayer.

Scripture for the Week

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one (John 17:20-22).

Week 1: Redefining Prayer

Leader's Weekly Journal

This week, I learned the following about God...

This week, I learned the following about my group members...

(Share your thoughts with your coach or pastor when you next meet.)