

STUDY GUIDE
GROUPS / INDIVIDUALS

FOUR SESSIONS

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

MAX LUCADO

before
amen



THE POWER OF A
SIMPLE PRAYER

Session 1

Father, You Are Good

How should we draw near to God? Come like a little child. That was the advice of Jesus. Come carefree. Joy-filled. Playful. Trusting. Curious. Excited. Forget greatness; seek littleness. Trust more, strut less. Make lots of requests and accept all the gifts. Come to God like a child comes to Daddy.

Introduction

Insane complexity.

It is everywhere, seeking to swallow us up. It shouts so loud we can barely hear ourselves think. In many cases, it makes no sense. But the countless options, endless flavors, and infinite opportunities slam against our lives like a tsunami.

If you are more than fifty years old, you probably remember a time when there were only three TV channels. There was a time at night when a voice came on the television to say, “This concludes today’s programing.” After that announcement, the TV went blank! There was nothing to watch.

If you are under thirty, you can’t imagine a world without hundreds of channels available twenty-four hours a day providing cooking shows, shopping networks, sports, movies, situation comedies, children’s programming, “reality” shows, religious shows, news, and programs about virtually anything you can imagine. You can sit down to relax and watch a half hour of TV and spend the entire time wading through the sea of options, never settling on something entertaining or relaxing.

Suppose you wanted to learn about fly-fishing. Years ago, you would find someone who loved the sport and have a conversation with him or her. You might check out a book about fly-fishing from the local library. If you were really motivated, you could go out and watch an actual person artistically dance a fly across the waters of a stream. But today, if you want to get an introduction to fly-fishing, all you have to do is a Google

search. Within a fraction of a second, you will have at your disposal more than ninety million online articles, videos, sales promotions, pictures, and perspectives on this one topic.

Into our complex world, Jesus calls us to prayer. His invitation is gentle and quite simple. Be honest. Be yourself. There are not a lot of rules. You don't need ninety million articles and videos to learn to pray. Just talk with your heavenly Father and be confident that he hears you, he loves you, and he is good.

Prayer is simply a heartfelt conversation
between God and his child.

Talk About It

What are some of the things we do that make prayer more complex than it needs to be?

or

Who taught you to pray? What did he or she teach you?

Before Amen Study Guide

Video Teaching Notes

As you watch the video teaching segment for Session 1 featuring Max Lucado, use the following outline to record anything that stands out to you.

A member of the PGA (Prayer Giants Association) or the PWA (Prayer Wimps Association)

Why we pray

The disciples' sign-up sheet for Prayer 101 with Jesus

Father, You Are Good

A simple, easy-to-remember, pocket-sized prayer: *Father, you are good. I need help. They need help. Thank you. In Jesus' name, amen.*

The launch pad of prayer: “Oh, Daddy”

How to pray and how not to pray

Prayer expresses trust and also builds trust

Before Amen Study Guide

Start each day in prayer

Before you face the world, face your Father.

Video Discussion and Bible Study

1. Talk about your personal experience with prayer. Be honest as to whether you struggle or excel. Just share your journey.

2. Tell about a person in your life who models passionate and natural prayer. What drives that person to pray? What have you learned by observing his or her intimate communication with God?

3. Max says, “We all have our doubts about prayer.” Describe a time when you struggled with prayer. What questions did you ask? How honest were you with God? How has God taken you a few steps forward as a person of prayer through your doubting process?

Prayer is the hand of faith on the door handle of your heart.

Read: Matthew 6:9–13

4. What are some of the key topics Jesus teaches his followers to focus on in this prayer? Why are these topics simple yet very important?

Before Amen Study Guide

Max offers a little prayer—a springboard—to launch us into conversation with God on some of the epic and massive yet simple topics of life. Here is the prayer:

Father, you are good.

I need help.

They need help.

Thank you.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Let the pocket-sized prayer punctuate your day.

5. Max says that “Oh, Daddy” is a good way to begin a prayer. What are some of the various ways we can address God? What does each attribute, quality, or name mean as we speak to God in prayer?

God's unrivaled goodness undergirds everything else we can say about prayer.

6. If we truly approached God as a dear, loved, tender Daddy, what kind of interaction would mark our conversation with him?

Read: Matthew 6:5–8

7. How have you seen prayer become a production or an opportunity for spiritual showing off? How have you seen this kind of attitude and practice find its way into your own conversations with God, either in private or in public?

God is low on fancy, high on accessibility.

Read: Isaiah 46:9 and Genesis 1:1–5, 26–27

8. Why can you trust God when it comes to your life and prayers? What has God done in your life to show you that he is trustworthy? What is one action you can take that will show God and the people around you that you know he is good and trustworthy?

9. In the video presentation, Max gives a snapshot of how one person might start the day in prayer. Of course, it will look different for each person. What might a day of prayer look like in your life if you took the lesson of today's study seriously? In particular, what specific and practical thing could you do during *one* of these times of the day to show God that you trust him and know he is good?

- When you first wake up, before you get out of bed ...
- As you encounter family members or roommates where you live ...
- As you work, go to school, or engage in your vocation ...
- When you face a point of tension or conflict ...
- When something good and joy-filled happens ...

If God were only mighty, we would salute him. But since he is merciful and mighty, we can approach him.

Closing Prayer

Take time as a group to pray in any of the following directions:

- Thank God for someone in your life who has been a consistent example of simple, authentic, passionate prayer.
- Confess where you have been a prayer wimp and let God know that you want to learn to pray with greater passion and authenticity.
- Tell God some of the ways you have experienced his goodness.
- Thank God for being a loving and present Father.
- Thank God for hanging in there with you, even when you struggled with doubts and questions.

Just as a happy child cannot mis-hug,
the sincere heart cannot mis-pray.

Between Sessions

Personal Reflection

Take time in personal reflection to think about the following questions:

- What are some of the ways I pray that are natural and flow out of a simple understanding of God as my Father — as my Daddy? How can I develop this part of my prayer life?
- What are some bad habits, routines, or attitudes that have seeped into my life of prayer? What can I do to minimize and remove these?
- What experiences have caused me to question God's goodness and wonder if he really cares about me or hears my prayers? How can I talk with God about these specific things that keep me from praying with confidence?
- How do I tend to address God in prayer? How has God been like a loving Father to me? How could I address him with more intimate and trusting names?
- Are there certain times or situations when my prayers tend to become more of a production? How can I seek greater authenticity in these moments?

Personal Actions

Starting Your Day with a Pocket-Sized Prayer

For the next week, start each day lifting up this simple prayer. Commit it to memory (this should take only a few minutes).

Father,

You are good.

I need help.

They need help.

Thank you.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Say this prayer out loud. Emphasize one line at a time, and then build on that line. When you pray, “I need help,” linger there and talk with your Father about a few areas of your life where you really *do* need help. When you pray the words, “Thank you,” let God know about some of the things he has done that make you smile and bring joy to your heart. Each day, let this prayer become a simple tool to express your heart to the One who loves you most and wants you to know that he is a trustworthy and good Father.

The power of prayer depends on the One who hears the prayers, and the One who hears the prayer is my Daddy.

Living Lessons

God has placed people in your life who model prayer that is real, natural, and rooted in a confidence in their heavenly Father. These people are living prayer lessons for you to learn from. Identify two or three people who live the kind of prayer life you long to experience. Then, call one of these people and ask if he or she would be willing to help you learn about prayer during the weeks you are walking through the *Before Amen* group study. If the person is willing, try some (or all) of the following:

1. Interview the person about prayer. Keep notes that you can share with the rest of your group members. Here are some questions to get the conversation started:

Who taught you to pray?

How does prayer weave through the flow of your normal day?

How does prayer connect you to God as your Father?

What advice would you give to someone who wants to grow deeper as a person of prayer?

Have you faced a time when it was hard to pray? If so, what helped you during that time?

Are there prayer pitfalls you could warn me to avoid?

2. Invite this person to pray *for* you during the coming four weeks as you learn to pray with greater passion, authenticity, and trust in your heavenly Father.

Before Amen Study Guide

3. Ask the person if he or she would be willing to pray *with* you once a week during the four weeks of this small group learning experience. You could do this face-to-face or over the phone. As you pray with this person, seek to learn from his or her example and record any insights below.

Names Matter

In the coming four weeks, try to address God with new and fresh names. Each of God's names reflects an element of his character.

Begin by listing some names of God that you see used in Scripture and what the name expresses about him; a few examples have been provided. Use a Bible dictionary, concordance, or other reference tool, if necessary.

Then, as you pray, incorporate some of these names as the Spirit leads you.

| Names: | Meaning (what it expresses): |
|---------------|--|
| Father | God provides for, protects, and loves me |
| Lord | He is in charge, the master, the ruler of my life |
| Savior | He died on the cross and rose again, paying the penalty for my sin |

God has authority over the world ... and over *your* world.

Recommended Reading

As you reflect on what God is teaching you through this session, read chapters 1–3 of the book *Before Amen* by Max Lucado. In preparation for your next session, read chapters 4–6.

