

A Prayer Log That Works!

An innovative way to track your group's requests over time

By Pat J. Sikora

How do you manage prayer requests in your small group? I don't mean how do you pray for them, but how do you keep track of them? How do you remind yourself to pray? How do you know when a prayer has been answered? How do you know if people in your group are growing through prayer or just whining?

If you're like most group leaders (and members), you write prayer requests on the note page of your Bible study. Or scrounge for a scrap of paper (which promptly gets lost or tossed before the week is over). Maybe you've even used a prayer journal where you list requests sequentially each week. Or you may simply try to remember them. (You don't, of course, but your intentions are good.)

And then, what happens next week? Probably the same thing. You write down new requests as if they were unrelated to last week's. Or the week before. Of course, when a repeated prayer is answered, you rejoice. But if it isn't answered in a timely manner or in the way expected, you forget all about it.

A Vital Change

Is that the way small group prayer time is supposed to be? I don't think so. In fact, I believe that a vital prayer time is critical to the effectiveness of a small group. In effective groups, people grow and change. And seeing God answer prayer—their own and those of others—builds faith for more change.

Over the years I've used just about every prayer request reminder method known. But there is one method I love and use whenever I have a group that is serious about personal growth. I use it in discipleship groups and groups where members are committed to making real changes in their lives.

The key to this method is to *list prayer requests by person rather than by date*. Most of us list requests by date, so we miss the flow for each person (assuming we can find previous requests at all). In this method, I use a dedicated notebook and create a page or two for each person. Each person's page has a tabbed divider with his or her name on it. Then as we go around the room taking prayer requests, I flip to Sally's page and list her request for today just below her request from last week. When it's Jackie's turn, I flip to her page and list her requests below last week's.

I've used both bound journals and loose-leaf binders for this method. My favorite was a small 3" x 5" three-ring binder, with punched notepaper. That one was small enough to slip into my purse, allowing me redeem the time I spent standing in line by praying for group members. I'm sure my more tech-savvy readers can adapt an app for their PDA or phone that will work, as well. The key is listing by person so that each request is sequential by member. Small Post-its work fine for tabs and allow for changes to the group as necessary.

The Benefits

This method offers several advantages over traditional prayer logs or journals.

- **I can quickly note any changes or updates from previous weeks.** I can ask for a report on whatever we prayed about last week and bring closure to a request. Sometimes people's lives are in such a tizzy that they come up with a new request every week without paying attention to what God has done with past requests—especially those that are a few weeks old. That doesn't build faith. It's just dumping. By being able to look back over recent history, we can see a trend.
- **We are sure to note answers to prayer.** When God answers a group member's prayer, I note the answer in red with a date and details. Sometimes the answer isn't what we prayed for, but it is an answer. Over time, seeing a page of red marks is a real faith-builder. Some people are so focused on today they forget to give the praise report.

It's important to acknowledge *when* and *how* God answers our prayers. Otherwise, why bother praying? This may require us to look at requests through a different lens. If John was praying for the ability to buy a new car to get to work, but was offered a loaner for as long as he needs it, is that an answer? I think so. Sometimes we don't give God credit for answering in ways

EVALUATING PRAYER IN YOUR SMALL GROUP

we didn't expect. As a leader, it's my job to help people see that God is far bigger and more creative than we can imagine.

- **We can use this prayer journal to improve accountability.** This is critical in discipleship or growth-oriented groups. Let's say that every week Randy asks us to pray he will lose weight. Fine, but what is *he* doing about it? Is he using prayer requests as a substitute for his own hard work? Is he looking for a fairy godmother rather than the God of the universe?

When I see a repeated request week after week (and it's more obvious in this format than any other), I'll ask what he's doing and how we can help him achieve his goal. I can point out that he's made the same request with no progress for four weeks. What might God want him to do to bring about his desired outcome? How might God be using this need in his life to grow him to greater maturity? I can also use the prayer list as a reminder to myself to encourage him mid-week with a call or email.

- **We can build relational continuity.** Sometimes prayers aren't answered until long after the group has disbanded and people have moved on. But if I've invested myself in praying for a person, I want to know when they get their answer. By keeping them in the journal and praying my way through it from time to time, I may be prompted to follow-up and check on the status. It's amazing how encouraging it is in this world of disposable relationships for a person to be asked about a prayer request a year or two later.

I've become a fan of this prayer log. Scroll down to the next page to see a generic form and an example page. Give it a try! I think you'll benefit from this method as well.

—PAT J. SIKORA is founder of [Mighty Oak Ministries](#) and author of [Why Didn't You Warn Me? How to Deal with Challenging Group Members](#).

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PRAYER LOG

NAME John Smith

JOHN SMITH

DATE	REQUEST	UPDATE	ANSWERED!
1/12/11	<i>Just got laid off. Needs a job quick!</i>		
1/19/11	<i>Job</i>	<i>Had two interviews. Nothing yet.</i>	
	<i>Jenny is sick. Seems to be the flu.</i>		
1/26/11	<i>Job</i>	<i>Another interview. Getting discouraged</i>	
	<i>Jenny</i>	<i>Better and back at work</i>	<i>1/26/11</i>
2/2/11	<i>Job</i>	<i>Possible job in Memphis. Can they consider moving?</i>	
	<i>Both kids now sick. Praise: Jenny doesn't have to take time off to care for them...</i>		
2/9/11	<i>Job</i>	<i>Memphis fell through. More interviews, more resumes.</i>	
	<i>Kids</i>	<i>Back at school</i>	<i>2/9/11</i>
2/16/11	<i>Job</i>	<i>2nd interview at Consolidated. Looks promising.</i>	<i>2/18/11 – Hired at Consolidated!! Looks like a good fit!</i>