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# Interpretation Bible Studies Leader's Helps—Job

By David C. Hester

Study Guide by Martha Miller

## Leader Preparation

In preparation for leading this study, read the entire book of Job. Consider making notes of particular sections or verses that stand out for you. Read through the IBS study book, focusing on the introduction. This will help you get a feel for the book and the main topics covered in the study. Read each unit of the study book carefully before leading the session, and reflect on the notes you took while reading the book of Job initially.

This study is not designed to be used in the lecture style. Therefore, think about the setup of the teaching space. Consider arranging the tables in a semicircle. This will allow participants to see one another while also providing the comfort of being behind a table. This study is interactive, and many activities lend themselves to writing, making the use of tables helpful.

The activities and the estimated time to allot for each are suggestions. Get to know the people with whom you are working, and adjust the sessions to meet their needs and learning styles.

Remember that the Holy Spirit will be with you throughout the study. Engage in conversation with God at every step, and pray for the Spirit to be felt through the words and activities of each session.

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# 1

## “There Was a Man Named Job” (Job 1:1–2:13)

**Objective:** To form community within the study group and become familiar with the main characters and themes of the book of Job

**Materials:**

- Bible
- Newsprint
- Marker
- Tracing of a footprint cut from construction paper or cardstock and tape

### Opening (10 minutes)

Welcome the group and begin your time together with an exercise designed to build community. This will lay a foundation for the entire study and give group members a chance to feel comfortable sharing with one another.

Read the first verse of the book of Job (1:1):

There once was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

Invite the group members to introduce themselves to the others using a similar format. Encourage them to use their own place of birth, their name, and a short description of who they are or why they have joined the group. For example,

There once was a woman in the land of Kentucky whose name was Martha. That woman was serving as an educator, excited about participating in this group, and anxious to learn more about Job.

After each person has had an opportunity to share, pray together using these words or some of your own:

*Gracious God, you knew us before we were born. You know our name even now. As we begin this journey together, we enter with confidence, confidence of your everlasting presence. Prepare our hearts and minds as we learn more about each other and about your Word. Amen.*

## **Presentation (15 minutes)**

Introduce the group to Job and several of the other characters in this story by inviting them to create a brief timeline and biography of the first two chapters of the book of Job.

Draw a horizontal line across the middle of a piece of newsprint, as the basis of the timeline. Ask the group to help fill it in by mentioning the events and their order of occurrence.

On a separate piece of newsprint, draw a vertical line down the middle. List the characters down the left side of the paper, and ask the group members to contribute short descriptors about each. Write these in the right column, across from their respective name.

Ask the group to mention other portions in these chapters or from the reading that struck them as interesting or puzzling. Talk about these as a group, reading directly from the Scripture passage if necessary.

## **Exploration (10 minutes)**

Examine the text and the readings further by discussing the answers to the following questions that appeared throughout this session's readings.

Remember that there are no definitive answers, and be conscious to value each person's statements. Although every person in the group has encountered suffering, each has experienced it differently.

- How does suffering change us?
- How does a person of deep faith and close relationship with God respond to undeserved suffering?
- Why do we worship God? What would it mean to worship God "for nothing"?

## Closing (10 minutes)

The book of Job represents a journey: a journey from suffering to healing. To symbolize this journey and further develop a safe community, each session will close with a footstep along the journey.

Write the word *suffering* in large letters on the footstep. Or if the group is comfortable with one another, consider encouraging the group to form a consensus about another word or phrase that represents the emotion of Job's suffering and loss. Pay attention to group members who may be quiet during this conversation, and invite them to give their opinion, giving each person a voice in the discussion. Write the word on the paper footstep.

Post the footprint on the wall of the meeting space as a reminder for the next gathering.

Close the time in prayer. Ask the group to read unit 2 of the study book and Job 3:1–26 before the next gathering.

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## “Let There Be Darkness” (Job 3:1–26)

**Objective:** To get in touch with the suffering of Job and his feelings of deep lament

**Materials:**

- Bible
- Newsprint/overhead transparency
- Marker
- Tracing of a footprint cut from construction paper or cardstock and tape

### Opening (5 minutes)

Print the words of Psalm 42:1–3 on newsprint or an overhead transparency, and place it where everyone can see it. Invite the group to sit comfortably and listen to the words of the psalm. Read it aloud slowly several times.

Use these words of prayer or some of your own:

*Loving God,  
In the midst of silence, you are there.  
In the midst of darkness, you are there.  
In the midst of cursing, you are there.  
In the midst of suffering, you are there.  
In the midst of each other, you are there.  
Be present with us.  
Amen.*

### Presentation (15 minutes)

This chapter gives examples of a gamut of emotions and actions: silence, cursing, darkness, suicide, and enmity. We are also beginning to observe Job’s great faith struggle.

Encourage the group to feel Job’s great pain by reading the words of chapter 3 aloud. Divide the group into two, and have participants

read the verses responsively, one group reading the odd-numbered verses and the other group responding with the even-numbered verses.

Discuss the following ideas and questions together:

- On what is your faith based? What are some of your assumptions or learnings about God? Describe some personal experiences that have reinforced these beliefs.
- Job feels “hedged in” by God, a feeling that used to be positive, representing God’s protection. Describe this feeling and how you can relate to it.
- Jesus, as well as Job, expressed feelings of abandonment by God (Matt. 27:46). Have you ever had those feelings? What was it like? [from p. 27]

### Exploration (20 minutes)

Using the words of Psalm 42 used earlier or another psalm of lament as a model, invite the group members to write a psalm or a poem expressing their own feelings in times of suffering.

You can do this by brainstorming ideas for one group poem or by giving time for everyone to work on their own and share completed poems with the group as they feel comfortable.

### Closing (5 minutes)

Create a new footstep on the journey.

Write the word *lament* in large letters on the footstep. Or, facilitate a consensus-building exercise to discover another word for this session’s footstep. A word of lament representing faith struggle may have bubbled up as the group created their own psalm or poem earlier. Write the word on the footprint.

Post the footstep next to the one from the first session, creating the beginning of a path across the wall or bulletin board.

Close in prayer. Ask the group to read unit 3 of the study book and Job 6:1–7:21 before the next gathering.

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## In the Image of God (Job 6:1–7:21)

**Objective:** To experience Job’s feelings on his journey of suffering while also reflecting on the qualities of friendship

**Materials:**

- Bible
- Newsprint
- Marker
- Tracing of a footprint cut from construction paper or card-stock and tape

### Opening (10 minutes)

Divide a piece of newsprint in half with a vertical line. Label one column “Humans” and one column “God.”

Begin your time together by inviting the participants to list the qualities that humans possess and those that God possesses. Write them under the appropriate column.

Open in prayer using the words on the newsprint offered in a form of prayer similar to this one:

*Holy God, as we focus on your presence with us now, we remember that you are [insert qualities of God here]. As we look around the room, we meet the eyes of one another, those we have come to know even more intimately. We are [insert qualities of humans here]. In the midst of it all, we ask for your wisdom and your guidance as we study your Word to us today. Amen.*

### Presentation (15 minutes)

Connect Job’s experience with that of the group members by engaging in the following experience:

Imagine that you are standing on a threshold. You are at a monumental place in your journey. Across the threshold stands “what you may come to believe,” while this side of the threshold remains

“what you thought was true.” Your experience is pushing you over the threshold. If and when you feel comfortable sharing, give the group a brief synopsis of your experience.

In our human community, at any given moment we may be surrounded by others standing at the threshold. Explore how we can demonstrate the holy calling of friendship to those who may be suffering. Invite the group members to share stories about friendship and how friends were helpful in those “threshold” moments.

Read aloud from the last paragraph on page 36 of the study book and its continuation on page 37, highlighting Job’s experiences.

### **Exploration (15 minutes)**

Engage in a meditation.

Read the conflicting images of the human condition as laid out in Psalm 8 and Job 7:17–18. Encourage the group members to listen to each account, paying attention to words and phrases that resonate. After a time of silence, allow those who are comfortable sharing to talk about what they heard and noticed.

Reflect on the readings from unit 3 and the focus of Job’s friends’ arguments about their views of God’s justice and the reasons for Job’s suffering. Give the group members time to ask questions about what they read and gain any clarification necessary.

### **Closing (5 minutes)**

Create a new footstep to add to the journey.

Many words of emotion have been used throughout this session. As a group, find a word that might encapsulate the conversation and its emotions. The word may be *threshold*, a quality of God, or a word about friendship. Write the word on the footstep, and add it to the journey wall.

Close your time in prayer. Ask the group to read unit 4 of the study book and Job 9–10 before the next gathering.



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## Holding God Accountable (Job 9–10)

**Objective:** To get at the heart of the question “why” and experience Job’s need for a trial with God

**Materials:**

- Bible
- Newsprint
- Marker
- Tracing of a footprint cut from construction paper or card-stock and tape

### Opening (5 minutes)

Open your time together using this prayer or one of your own choosing:

*Come, O Holy Spirit.*

*Come as Holy Fire and burn in us,*

*come as Holy Wind and cleanse us within,*

*come as Holy Light and lead us in the darkness,*

*come as Holy Truth and dispel our ignorance,*

*come as Holy Power and enable our weakness,*

*come as Holy Life and dwell in us.*

*Convict us, convert us, consecrate us,*

*until we are set free from the service of ourselves,*

*to be your servants to the world. Amen.*

*Book of Common Worship, p. 22*

### Presentation (10 minutes)

Much of this unit focuses on Job’s desire for justice and the ability to plead his case while also finding out God’s reasons for causing such extreme suffering. Keeping this in mind, give time for the group members to reflect on the readings, sharing one item that stood out for them.

Provide some background about wisdom tradition if it has not come through in earlier chapters. It is important to avoid injecting all of our cultural and modern beliefs upon characters who lived in a different culture and time period. This foundation will be important as you move to the next section of this lesson.

### **Exploration (20 minutes)**

To get at the heart of the emotions involved in the characters, stage a mock trial with the group.

The group may choose to stage the trial using a more modern format with a judge, prosecutor, defendant, and witnesses for both sides.

Or, they might choose a more ancient type such as that described in the middle of page 42 of the study book. This format might include elders, who hear the case, a respondent, and witnesses, with the elders rendering the decision.

In either format, determine who will simulate each part, and gather facts and opinions for use in arguments. What charges would be brought? Who would be called to testify? There might also be some question about whether the trial is justified.

### **Closing (10 minutes)**

Create a new footstep to add to the journey.

Because much of this unit focused on the question “why,” you might consider adding this word to this unit’s footstep. Talk together about this question, how it is used, and how the group members would respond to Job or another who might ask it.

Close in prayer, giving group members a chance to vocalize their personal prayer requests. Ask the group to read unit 5 of the study book and Job 12:1–14:22 before the next gathering.

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## Job's Impossible Dream (Job 12:1–14:22)

**Objective:** To explore the prospect of hope and its connection to relationships with God and with each other

**Materials:**

- Bible
- Newsprint
- Marker
- An assortment of images from magazines and newspapers
- Paper, pens, and envelopes
- Tracing of a footprint cut from construction paper or cardstock and tape

### Opening (15 minutes)

As the group members enter the meeting space, encourage each to find an image that represents hope to them.

When everyone has had a chance to find an image, invite the group to share what they found. If the group is large, consider sharing first in pairs and then sharing highlights with the whole group.

Open with the following prayer or one of your own choosing:

*For the hope we see, we praise you, God.*

*For the hope we feel, we praise you, God.*

*For the hope we know, we praise you, God.*

*For the hope we seek, we praise you, God.*

*For the hope we gain from you, we praise you, God.*

*For the hope we see in each other, we forever praise you, God.*

*Amen.*

### Presentation (10 minutes)

Connect the discussion about hope with the readings from unit 5. Talk together about Job's emotions throughout these chapters and the aspects of hope included in them.

As a part of this discussion, highlight Job's struggle with his beliefs conflicting with his experiences. Give the group time to meditate and share their thoughts on the following:

- If your experiences suddenly came in strong conflict with your most precious beliefs, how would you react?
- How did Job react?
- How would your reactions differ from those of Job?

### **Exploration (15 minutes)**

Many of Job's struggles are based in relationship or the loss thereof. Engage the group in thoughts about relationship through the use of the following suggestions, keeping in mind that this will be a personal and possibly emotional experience:

- Invite the group to brainstorm qualities of a healthy relationship. Record these characteristics on a piece of newsprint.
- Once the list is created, give each group member a piece of paper and invite each to concentrate on his or her own relationship with God, writing down those qualities from the newsprint that could be strengthened.
- Give each person a chance to write some ideas or covenants about what actions he or she will take to strengthen the relationship.
- Encourage the group members to fold up their paper and place it in an envelope. Ask them to take it home and continue to work on following through to develop the relationship.

Remembering that this is intended to be a personal experience, try to avoid the need for some to share with the group. Allow silence.

### **Closing (5 minutes)**

Create a new footstep to add to the journey.

This session has possibly been an emotional one, giving group members much to think about. Consider adding the word *hope* to

this unit's footstep, talking together about all of the thoughts brought up in the session and their relationship to ultimate hope.

Post the footstep on the journey wall and close in prayer. Ask the group to read unit 6 of the study book and Job 19:1–29 before the next gathering.

# 6

## “I Want to See God” (Job 19:1–29)

**Objective:** To feel the lonely words of Job 19 and reflect on the need to see and feel God

**Materials:**

- Bible
- Newsprint
- Marker
- Various versions of the Bible
- *God In Between* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998)
- Tracing of a footprint cut from construction paper or cardstock and tape

### Opening (15 minutes)

Begin this session with a time of meditation. Since the focus of this unit is on chapter 19 of Job, spend some time as a group reading it together and listening for what it is saying to each participant.

Read the chapter slowly, loudly, and distinctly. Ask the other group members to listen carefully and write down any words or phrases that resonate or stand out as the passages are being read.

Allow for a time of silence to let the words sink in.

Invite another group member to read the chapter again, encouraging the other members to listen for what the passage may be saying to them.

After another period of silence, call for a brief time of sharing, allowing space for individuals to share what they heard as they feel comfortable.

Open with prayer.

### Presentation (10 minutes)

Now that the group has had a chance to hear and meditate on one biblical version of Job 19, encourage the opportunity to explore these words in differing versions.

Using a variety of versions of the Bible, find some of the interesting differences in interpretation. It is not necessary to be knowledgeable in Hebrew for this exercise. Instead, stress the author's explanation of the translating process from page 59 of the book. Distribute the versions to the group members, and have them take turns reading verses of chapter 19 aloud. Reflect on some of the variations.

### **Exploration (10 minutes)**

Explain to the group that we each interpret words and see God in varying ways. As one example of a parable about finding God, read aloud the children's book *God In Between*.

Following the story, connect the villagers' inability to find God with the loss of relationship that Job may have felt. Like Job, the villagers were cut off from others and lived lives of isolation. It took the forming of relationships for them to see God, who was present all along.

### **Closing (10 minutes)**

Create a new footstep to add to the journey.

Write the word *lonely* in large letters on this session's footstep. As it is added to the journey wall, encourage group members to think about commitments they can make to serve the lonely in their own congregation/community.

Close in a prayer during which group members verbalize their commitments. Ask the group to read unit 7 of the study book and Job 29–31 before the next gathering.

# 7

## Job's Final Appeal (Job 29–31)

**Objective:** To examine Job's continuation on the journey through art and prayer

**Materials:**

- Bible
- Newsprint
- Marker
- Paper and pens
- Meditative music (optional)
- Tracing of a footprint cut from construction paper or cardstock and tape

### Opening (10 minutes)

Page 69 of the study book includes an artist's rendering of Job. Encourage the group members to spend time examining this picture.

Invite the group members to suggest emotions the picture invokes. Record their suggestions on newsprint.

Open with prayer, using the following prayer or one of your own:

*Almighty and everlasting God,  
the comfort of the sad,  
the strength of those who suffer,  
let the prayers of your children who cry out of any tribulation  
come to you.  
To every soul that is distressed,  
grant mercy, grant relief, grant refreshment;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*Book of Common Worship, p. 836*

### Presentation (10 minutes)

Discuss the chapters and the readings from the study book by engaging in conversation with the group. Use the content from the book along with the following questions to invoke discussion:



- In these chapters Job looks back on his memories and his “good life.” What, for you, constitutes a good life?
- What role does God play as you look back at your own memories?
- Think about your community. What values would you say are a part of your community?

### **Exploration (15 minutes)**

Having gotten the group in touch with the emotions of Job through an artist's rendering and through an examination of their own memories and values, allow time for more inward reflection through prayer.

On page 76 of the study book, the author says, “only faith dares shout at God so loudly and accuse God so boldly. Only faith can feel forsaken by God. And only faith can hope against hope that beyond divine silence there is presence and beyond incomprehensibility, meaning.” Focusing on these words and those of Job's throughout these chapters, invite group members to write their own prayers to God. Consider playing some meditative background music as group members work. The group may choose to spend some time discussing the quote found on page 76 prior to doing the individual work.

### **Closing (10 minutes)**

Create a new footstep to add to the journey.

Because group members have been working individually and silently, provide an opportunity to brainstorm words that might be added to this session's footstep. Facilitate a process of consensus building to agree on one word. After writing it on the footstep, add it to the journey wall.

Invite group members to share their written prayers aloud as they feel comfortable. Ask the group to read unit 8 of the study book and Job 38:1–40:5 before the next gathering.

# 8

## Out of the Whirlwind (Job 38:1–40:5)

**Objective:** To reflect on the presence of God as it is witnessed by Job and felt by the participants

**Materials:**

- Bible
- Newsprint
- Marker
- Hymnals or song sheets
- Tracing of a footprint cut from construction paper or cardstock and tape

### Opening (10 minutes)

After the group has gathered, lead them in a spectrum exercise.

Explain that the meeting space is now a spectrum, with one side of the room representing one extreme and the opposite side representing the other. Invite the group members to place themselves at some point on the spectrum based on their responses to the following pairs of statements and others of your choosing.

- I feel closer to God when I am alone. I feel closer to God when I am in community with others.
- I feel closer to God in the silence. I feel closer to God in the midst of noise.
- I feel closer to God at the beach. I feel closer to God in the mountains.
- I feel closer to God through contemplative music. I feel closer to God through contemporary music.

Invite the group members to share places and events where they see or feel God.

Open in prayer. Consider using some of the words from Psalm 104.

## **Presentation (15 minutes)**

Engage the group in a discussion about the content of these chapters of Job and the readings from this unit of the study guide. Encourage questions about the readings and reflections about the insights of the author.

These chapters include God's first response to Job. Now that the group has begun to think about where they feel the presence of God through the opening activity, challenge them to remember a specific time that God's presence was made evident to them. Encourage the group members to share these stories with someone sitting near them or, if they feel comfortable, with the large group.

Keep in mind that some group members may not have a story to share. Reassure them that each of us goes through our journey with differing experiences. Encourage them to listen to the stories of others.

## **Exploration (10 minutes)**

Follow the discussion with these questions:

- How were you made aware of the presence of God?
- What were your emotions at the time? What are they now, looking back?
- What, do you imagine, were Job's emotions upon becoming aware of God's presence and receiving an answer?
- How do you think this experience changed Job?
- Have you been changed? How?

## **Closing (10 minutes)**

This section of God's answer to Job is focused on creation and includes "a glimpse of God's complex design of the world Job thought he knew" (p. 88). As the author of the study guide points out, this speech is a creation hymn, similar to Psalm 104. Several hymns and songs have been written to reflect the words of Psalm 104. Join together in singing one of these songs, such as, "O Worship the

King, All Glorious Above!” (#476 in the *Presbyterian Hymnal*), which uses the words of this psalm as its basis.

Create a new footstep to add to the journey.

Write the word *praise* in large letters on this session’s footstep. Close with a one-word prayer, asking each group member to add one word of praise after the prayer is begun. Close the prayer once all have had a chance to speak. Add the footstep to the journey wall.

Ask the group to read unit 9 of the study book and Job 40:6–42:6 before the next gathering.

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## Out of the Whirlwind a Second Time (Job 40:6–42:6)

**Objective:** To connect God’s mighty works and the process from chaos to order to Job’s, and ultimately our, transformation

**Materials:**

- Bible
- Newsprint
- Marker
- Photographs or magazine pictures of various parts of creation (trees, flowers, animals, oceans, and the like)
- Modeling clay or Play-Doh, a small amount for each person
- Tracing of a footprint cut from construction paper or cardstock and tape

### Opening (10 minutes)

Begin your time together with a period of sharing. Invite the group members to choose a picture that describes their day (or week). These examples may be given: “I chose this picture of a pinecone because my day has been interesting, yet I’ve had to look closely for any signs of seeds, or good, that may come from it.” Or “My day has been like the ocean, a bit choppy and quite cold.”

After each person has had an opportunity to share, open in prayer.

### Presentation (15 minutes)

Job became focused on justice, particularly, in his view, the *in*justices shown to him. In this session, he is learning about those things that exist beyond his control. God is demonstrating the order formed out of chaos.

Distribute a small amount of modeling clay to each participant. Encourage people to work with it in their hands. Consider playing some music in the background, giving the group time to feel the

clay. After a few minutes, encourage group members to form a creation that represents, for them, chaos.

### **Exploration (15 minutes)**

Encourage the group to talk together about the readings. Reflect on the author's interpretation of the beasts, Behemoth and Leviathan, as well as the other important messages in these chapters of Job. Consider using the study questions found at the end of the unit in the study book to spur discussion.

After spending time discussing the unit and the Scripture passage and examining any lingering questions, stress the fact that Job gained reassurance that the intensity of chaos could not overpower that of God's creation. With this thought in mind, encourage the group members to reshape their chaotic structures into something representing creation and order, something inspired by God.

Invite the group to walk around the room or look around the table and examine one another's visions.

### **Closing (5 minutes)**

Create a new footstep to add to the journey.

Write the word *transformation* on this session's footstep and add it to the journey wall. Comment on the journey that has been taking place and is represented along the wall.

Close in prayer. Ask the group to read unit 10 of the study book and Job 42:7–17 before the next gathering.

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## The Afterword (Job 42:7–17)

**Objective:** Reflect on the ending of the book of Job and review the past ten-session study

**Materials:**

- Bible
- Newsprint
- Marker
- Tracing of a footprint cut from construction paper or cardstock and tape
- Candle and matches

### Opening (10 minutes)

Invite the group members to describe their day based on the following choices:

- A fairy tale
- A horror flick
- A soap opera
- A comedy
- A tragedy
- A reality show
- A game show

Open in prayer using the following or one of your own choosing:

*Loving God, we come before you never certain what each new day will bring, yet thankful that the morning brings new light. Walk with us along this journey, as we travel together as your children. We ask for the presence of your Spirit as we conclude this portion of our journey, learning about one of your own and connecting his experiences to our own. Amen.*

## Presentation (15 minutes)

Talk together about the ending of the book of Job. Use the following questions to guide the discussion, but open the time to questions beyond these examples. Keep in mind that one of the themes of this section is that there will always be questions that cannot be answered. Don't expect to answer all of the questions that are asked.

- What was your reaction to the end of the book?
- What surprised you?
- What frustrated you?
- What, if anything, has left you confused?
- If you were to write a new ending for the book, what would it be?

## Exploration (10 minutes)

Since this is the last session of the study, focus a portion of the meeting on the journey wall that has been created throughout these units. Give the group members time to look at the footsteps that have been added and, as a group, recall the sections of Job's story that correspond with the words included on each footstep.

On the final footstep, write the word *healing*, remembering that when this exercise was introduced in the first section, the book of Job was described as a journey from suffering to healing.

Share together about the ways that Job proceeded in this journey and the ways that the group members, themselves, have participated in the journey.

## Closing (10 minutes)

Conclude this study by joining in a closing ritual. Place a candle in the center of the group and light it, using these words:

*Our lives are journeys. We walk alone and we walk in community.  
We light this candle as a reminder of Christ, who guides us and  
lights the way along our path.*



While gathered around the candle, close in prayer using the “pop-corn” format. Open the prayer and allow group members to “pop” in with their own prayers. Close the prayer once it seems that all have had an opportunity to speak aloud.