



# Unbinding Your Heart

## 40 Days of Prayer & Faith Sharing.

**Moniqua Suits – Event Coordinator**

*Unbinding Your Heart* (UYH) is a six week, 40 day, all church study of prayer and faith sharing. Perfect for existing classes and small groups and also for new ones formed just for the study, *UYH* is designed to enrich church community life; help individuals grow their face-to-face encounters with God and teach congregations how to talk about their faith. Our edition has 40-days of individual prayer exercises coordinated with each chapter and a personal prayer journal.

### I. Purpose

- a. Discover the role of prayer in developing a closer relationship with God;
- b. Teach us how to share our faith while increasing our comfort to share;
- c. Provide opportunities to practice prayer and faith sharing as a means of spiritual growth and development.

### II. Overview

- a. 40-day retreat: September 13 – October 24, 2009;
- b. Sign up: August 9 – September 12;
- c. Chi-Rho to Adults will participate in Small Groups;
- d. Celebration Sunday upon completion.

### III. Activities

- a. Daily reading, prayer and journaling activities, with weekly (bi-weekly for some groups) meetings; and
- b. Worship services with supporting messages and music.

### IV. Time and Place

- a. After Contemporary Service
- b. As the Adult Sunday School Class
- c. Chi-Ro and CYF Meetings
- d. Wed evening with light dinner then study
- e. As part of existing group meetings
- f. Electronic or Teleconferencing Meetings
- g. Suggested times and days are welcome

Led by a Small Group Leader, you will meet weekly (or bi-weekly) to discuss the chapters. Registration forms provide multiple options: 1. Existing group or person(s) preference; 2. Identify a schedule and location that best suits your needs; and 3. Request childcare.



## Navigating Change.

**Melissa Moody – Small Group Coordinator**

Change. It's a scary word for a lot of people. Whether it's a highly-anticipated change or one you've been dreading, change is different. You never know what to expect. To measure your reaction to change try this: fold your hands together. Look at where your thumbs are - most people will have their right thumb lying on top of their left thumb. Try switching their positions. How does it feel? It is change, and it is different, and maybe a little uncomfortable. But, the longer you sit with your left thumb on top of your right thumb, the more 'natural' it will start to feel. Prayer is the same way for a lot of people.

Several years ago, we started having our kids say Grace at the dinner table. Before every meal, we would hear "God is great, God is good, and we thank Him for our food" - that's what you expect from a 3 or 4 year old, right? About a year or two ago, we challenged our son to try something 'different' for the dinner prayer. As soon as we asked him to change it up a little, he really struggled to find 'new' ways to give thanks. But, as time went on, he found a 'new' prayer - a little more mature than "God is great...", but still very short and to the point.

This fall our church family, friends and neighbors have a great opportunity to explore change during the study of *Unbinding Your Heart*. In a small group format and led by a Small Group Leader, you will find those 'new' ways of sharing your faith with others, which will help you to see that change doesn't have to be scary.

## Journaling – A Spiritual Workout.

Margaret Lyon – General Resource Coordinator

A few weeks ago, while developing the retreat materials, I was reminded of an experience I had with journaling a while back. Over the previous ten years my older daughter had encouraged me to keep a journal at each birthday by sending me a lovely book in which to journal. With the best of intentions I started all of them with one or sometimes two entries and then they found their way to a shelf and gathering dust. Then I undertook a book called *The Artist's Way* and made a commitment to myself to write every morning for 12 weeks upon waking any and all thoughts that came until three pages were filled. This had to be hand written on 8 ½ X 11 paper – nothing fancy. I confess that I wrote most days, not all. Many days I started with *I don't know what to write*. But, invariably thoughts would start speeding into my head, faster than I could capture them at times; sometimes the thoughts turned into prayers. It was as exhilarating mentally as a good work out is physically. Each morning that I wrote, I came out of the experience energized and over all it was a reaffirming experience.

As I started reading *Unbinding Your Heart* for the purpose of putting together a retreat experience, I decided to go ahead and try some of the prayer exercises suggested there. And I had the same experience as when I wrote my 'morning pages'. The thoughts about what to include came flying, I felt I was being led.

As we begin our experience with *Unbinding Your Heart*, the author asks us to pray each day a different type of prayer and to journal about our prayer experiences. I encourage you to give it a try; my hope for you is that some of your experiences in doing so are very special to you, as these I have shared have been to me.

## What Is Prayer?

Larry Merkle – Prayer Team Coordinator

Three Sundays from now, we will begin a 40-day study of *Unbinding Your Heart*. Prayer will be an integral aspect of the study, and as the Prayer Team Coordinator, I will be writing a weekly column on this important subject. At this point, you might be asking yourself a few questions such as, "Well, what is prayer, anyway, really?" Or, "How do I know if I'm praying right?" Or, "What makes Larry Merkle such an expert about prayer?" Only the last of these three questions has a simple answer: "nothing!" I am definitely not an expert on prayer, which probably brings to mind an obvious follow-up question: "Well, then why should I bother reading this column?"

If you are in fact, still reading, then we have something in common. We both want to know more about prayer. Perhaps, like me, you've wondered off and on for a long time whether or not you pray enough. Perhaps, like me, you have sometimes asked what good it does to pray. Perhaps, like me, you have a secret fear that you're not praying "right." Perhaps, like me, you're willing to do whatever you can to learn about prayer. Perhaps that even includes listening to the partially thought out musings of a fellow believer in the hope that you might glean something of use. If any of this is true, then it is my most sincere hope (and prayer!) that you might find something in my columns that helps you in some small way to have a more fulfilling prayer life.

**“PRAYER IS TALKING  
TO GOD.”**

Let's get started, then. This being the first column in the series, let's try to establish what it is that we're talking about. What is prayer? Because Google knows everything, I searched on the string "define: prayer". The first response is, "the act of communicating with a deity (especially as a petition or in adoration or contrition or thanksgiving)." Not bad, but a little sterile for our purposes. Maybe we'll come back to that one later.

Instead, let's start with the answer posted in the hallway of our church building: "Prayer is talking to God." We certainly have plenty of examples that support this definition. Every Sunday in worship, we hear a pastoral prayer, we pray the Lord's Prayer together, we hear prayers at the table, and we might hear other prayers. In each case, we hear the divine being addressed ("Hey, God, we've got something to say to you, so please listen up"), and then we hear some words directed at God.

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## What is Prayer - cont

Clearly, talking to God is an important part of prayer. But another definition I've heard is that "Prayer is listening to God." At this point I have to confess that I'm guilty of the sin of envy. I am envious of people who know with certainty that they have heard God speaking to them. Not literally -- if you have heard a disembodied voice speaking to you in the King's English telling you what to do, I believe strongly that you should at least consider sharing that fact with a medical professional. On the other hand, I have known people who were absolutely sure that through a prayerful openness to God, they had received divine guidance in their life. Personally, I have never experienced such certainty. However, there have definitely been times in my life that after much prayer, reading the scriptures and interpretation, talking with fellow believers, and paying attention to the world around me I have felt confident that I understood where God's will was leading me.

That brings me to a simple definition that incorporates both of the aspects we've identified so far: "Prayer is talking *with* God." As trite as it is, this definition captures what I believe is an absolutely essential aspect of prayer: the conversation is not one-sided! God loves us and wants to be in relationship with us. In our human relationships, if there is no communication, the relationship stagnates. If we do all the talking and never stop to listen, we will eventually realize that we no longer know the other person. If we never contribute to the conversation, we may eventually find ourselves wondering why the other person doesn't seem to understand us as well as they used to. Communication is essential to human relationships, and so it is with our relationship with God. Prayer is our dedicated and most reliable communication channel for the relationship.

If we consider our last definition ("Prayer is talking with God"), it matches up pretty well with the first part of our first definition ("the act of communicating with a deity"). Next week, we'll take a look at the "petition, adoration, contrition, or thanksgiving" part of Google's definition. By way of foreshadowing, my prayer of petition is that these musings might somehow help you to open your communication channel with God.

**Our world is full of people  
who need to hear about  
God's redeeming love.**

## FAQ

David Turner - Pastor

**Is this E-vent really about "evangelism"?** Yes and no. No, it isn't the 'evangelism' most of us have come to associate with this word. It isn't about pressuring people about God. It isn't about increasing our church's membership. It isn't about putting a new coat of paint on an old building. Rather, it is about taking our faith seriously. Yes, it is about experiencing a genuine connection to the One who created us. It is about re-kindling our love for God and one another. And finally -- it is about what naturally springs from experiencing a deeper relationship with God which is the desire to tell others -- in plain words, who God is and what God has done in your life.

**Will I have to do a lot of reading?** There is one chapter for each of the six weeks -- easily read in one setting, but better enjoyed over the course of each week.

**What are the requirements for participation?** The level of your participation is entirely up to you. Each Sunday morning will be a culmination of the reading and devotional time of the week leading up to it -- but a person will not have to have read the book or participated in a small group in order to enjoy or be inspired by our worship. For those who choose to participate fully, the things I believe need to be present include: an open and willing heart, mind spirit; a copy of *Unbinding Your Heart*; participation in a small group; and daily prayers and devotions (provided in the book).

**Is there a cost to participating in the congregation-wide study of *Unbinding Your Heart*?** The cost of the books pre-purchased by our church is approximately \$10 per copy. We are asking for a donation of \$10 to help cover this cost -- understanding there will be some who cannot afford this expense and some who can cover the expense of books for themselves and many others. Regardless of one's financial position, we encourage every member to take a copy of *Unbinding Your Heart*.

**Why is *Unbinding Your Heart* important?** Our world is full of people, many of them right outside our doors, who need to hear the very message we sometimes take for granted. It is important because not only do we need to be revitalized in our own walk with God -- but because there are others who desperately need God's healing and wholeness in their lives and we may be the very ones God is calling to make that happen. Our church will certainly be blessed by *Unbinding Your Heart* -- but more importantly, you will be blessed personally -- and YOU are where it all begins.

**Will there be a variety of opportunities for me to be in a small group?** Yes. Small groups will be meeting at different times and places and will consider the needs of those participating. Let us know what days and times are best for you and we will do our best to find a group that best suits your needs.

**Is there a website I can visit?** Yes. [www.gracenet.info](http://www.gracenet.info)

# Resources

- ✓ Registration Completed
- ✓ Pick Up Book (2 weeks before September 13<sup>th</sup> )
- ✓ Group Leader Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ Small Group Members Names: \_\_\_\_\_  
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