

# LEADERS' GUIDE

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**Take ten:** This section takes just ten minutes to read and provides you with answers to all the basic 'why?', 'what?' and 'how?' questions relating to the course:

### **1. WHY THIS MATTERS: FOUR REASONS FOR RUNNING THE PRAYER COURSE**

#### **The Prayer Course could be one of the most significant things you ever do!**

It's been designed as a resource for small groups, to help millions of people go deeper in their relationship with God and to unlock the power of prayer in their lives. The aim is that over the course of six sessions, members of your group will get better at talking to God, better at listening to him and they'll probably start seeing more miracles too. Not a bad use of six weeks.

'Prayer is the essence of the spiritual life, without which all ministry loses its meaning. It is the fulfilment of The Great Commandment ...' – Henri Nouwen

#### **Why Small Groups?**

Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus gave most of his precious time in public ministry to leading a small group? Why? Because he knew that if he could just touch a few lives in a particular place deeply he would ultimately touch every life everywhere eternally. And this is precisely what God is calling you to do too.

#### **Who, me?**

As leaders we often feel under-qualified, especially in this area of prayer. A survey of more than 800 full-time pastors in America revealed that only 16 per cent of them were content with their prayer lives <sup>2</sup>, so if you're with the other 84 per cent feeling a little inadequate in your prayer-life, welcome to the party! But please don't delay running The Prayer Course until you feel like a spiritual giant with all the answers, because it might be rather a long wait. As you prepare for the course, you may wish to do a little background reading, in which case you could start with one of the following:

<sup>1</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life* (Crossroads Publishing Company, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pulpithelps.com/www/docs/1107-7632>

- Richard Foster, *Prayer, Finding the Heart's True Home*
- Pete Greig, *Red Moon Rising: The Adventure of Faith and the Power of Prayer*
- Timothy Jones, *The Art of Prayer*

### **Start with Stupid**

Jesus' small group once asked him something that got right to the heart of everything: 'Lord,' they said, 'teach us to pray.' Sometimes it can be difficult to admit our spiritual struggles, but notice how he responded. Jesus didn't rebuke the disciples for being unspiritual, nor did he make them feel small for their prayerlessness. In fact, it was in response to this simple acknowledgment of need that Jesus gave us the prayer that is prayed regularly by more than a third of the world's population. If they hadn't admitted their need that day by Galilee, we wouldn't have The Lord's Prayer today. As you shall see, this famous prayer forms the backbone of The Prayer Course.

### **Prayerfulness doesn't just get beamed down on super-saints**

If you look in the mirror and struggle to see a potential prayer warrior, try looking at those first disciples instead. From the moment they admitted that they were prayer weaklings, God began to turn them into prayer warriors. On at least one occasion the walls shook during their prayer meeting<sup>3</sup>, they prayed and received visions<sup>4</sup>, they prayed and people received healings, they even prayed Peter out of prison right under the nose of Herod.<sup>5</sup> And talking of Peter and noses, he sometimes prayed over handkerchiefs, which were then used miraculously by God.<sup>6</sup> In just a few years, the disciples had changed from spiritual lightweights whose prayers didn't work<sup>7</sup> into men who could be accused of turning the whole world upside down.<sup>8</sup>

### **Please do get your hopes up**

'Through prayer we can cross the space-time manifold of the cosmos and converse with God... Prayer must be considered the most powerful capacity God has made available to us.' – Dr Hugh Ross, astrophysicist<sup>9</sup>

Can I encourage you to approach The Prayer Course with excitement and expectancy? The people God has given you to shepherd may not be perfect, but if you teach them to pray they really will change the world. Your reasons for embarking on The Prayer Course could probably be summed up in just four simple observations, which we will now explore:

<sup>3</sup> Acts 4:31

<sup>4</sup> Acts 10: 9–16

<sup>5</sup> Acts 12:1–18

<sup>6</sup> Acts 19:12

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 9:18

<sup>8</sup> Acts 17:6

<sup>9</sup> Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos: How the Greatest Scientific Discoveries of the Century Reveal God* (NavPress, 1993)

1. You know that Jesus made prayer a top priority, so ...
2. It really should be a priority for us as Christians too, but ...
3. It can be difficult, confusing and even boring, so ...
4. 'Help!'

### **1. Prayer as a priority for Christ**

There are no fewer than seventeen references to Christ's active prayer life in the Gospels. This is remarkable because if anyone could ever have got away with NOT praying it would surely have been the Son of God. But Jesus was a man of prayer. He loved to pray. He needed to pray.

- We are told that he launched his mission with a forty-day prayer retreat and concluded it with a late-night prayer session in the garden of Gethsemane
- Between these two great prayer vigils he often rose early or stayed out all night simply to talk with his Father in heaven, especially prior to major transitions and decisions
- It was after one of these all-night prayer times that he hand-picked his disciples, and after another that he walked across the water to see them
- On one occasion (and I find this extraordinary) the Son of God even requested personal prayer support from his closest friends<sup>10</sup>

If Jesus needed to offer and receive prayer, how much more do we?

'There is but one road that reaches God and that is prayer. If anyone shows you another, you are being deceived.' – Teresa of Avila<sup>11</sup>

### **2. Prayer as a priority for Christians**

Followers of Jesus are called to do more than just admire Christ's dedication to prayer. We are also expected to emulate it. I could pull out individual verses to enforce this point (the prophet Samuel bluntly describes prayerlessness as sin in 1 Samuel 12:23), but that would be a bit like attempting to stargaze through a microscope.

- Take a step back and you'll see that every page of the Bible calls us to pray in one way or another
- Every saint down two thousand years calls us to pray
- Every chapter of church history calls us to pray
- Every newspaper and neighbour today is also a call to pray

Prayer isn't just an option on the Christian menu; it is the menu; the heart and soul of every aspect of our relationship with God. Before there was sin there was prayer, and long afterwards there will still be prayer and worship.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 26:38

<sup>11</sup> Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection* (Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), p. 75

You may be wondering why a course is needed to help people talk to God. Isn't prayer just doing what comes naturally? Well, Jesus was remarkably practical about it. He didn't just leave his disciples to work prayer out for themselves – he taught them about it:

- First, he gave them a *prototype prayer*<sup>12</sup> to use when they were talking to God and thinking about him too
- Second, he told *memorable parables* packed with wisdom about how to pray and how not to do it too<sup>13</sup>
- Third, he incentivised them with astounding promises about the things that would happen when people pray: 'If you ask anything in my name,' he said very simply, 'I will do it'<sup>14</sup> and we are left shaking our heads and thinking, 'Did he really mean what he just said?' Later, just to clear up any confusion, he adds: 'Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.'<sup>15</sup> And in the following chapter he says it again: 'Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full'<sup>16</sup>

These promises about prayer are either true or they are not, and if they are true there can be nothing more exciting or important on earth than learning how to put them into practice.

### 3. Trouble with prayer

Although prayer is vitally important and incredibly powerful, it isn't always easy. I once attended a prayer meeting at which everyone prayed so loudly, so passionately and so long that I honestly started wondering if I was even a Christian. Those intercessors seemed to know something I didn't. They were spiritually alive in a way I wasn't. Or maybe they just cared more than me.

Most people need help with prayer. This is partly because it can be difficult to understand *intellectually* ('why pray if God's all-powerful and all-knowing and he's going to do what he wants anyway?'), partly because it can be difficult to process *emotionally* ('why aren't my prayers for my disabled daughter making any noticeable difference?'), but mostly because prayer is just so difficult to *do* with any degree of diligence and power. We may know that prayer is super-important, but it can also be super-difficult to find the time, or the words, or the faith. And then, when we do pray, it's hard to know what to say about those who are starving, or persecuted, or trying to make complex decisions that will affect millions of lives.

That's why Teresa of Avila is one of my favourite saints. She was one of the greatest teachers on prayer ever, her insights are profound and she was used by God to bring renewal to whole sections of the sixteenth-century church. But even Teresa, who had such profound experiences, admitted that she sometimes found her prayer times so tedious that she would tap the hour-glass to make the time pass more quickly.

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<sup>12</sup> Luke 11:2 – 4

<sup>13</sup> Luke 11:8

<sup>14</sup> John 14:14

<sup>15</sup> John 15:7

<sup>16</sup> John 16:24

Few of us pray in the disciplined way that Jesus, or even Teresa of Avila did, and Western congregations rarely pray today like they do in other parts of the world where the church is exploding with power and life. I read somewhere that most British churches don't even hold a weekly prayer meeting and sadly I have little reason to doubt it. We often talk about God more than we actually talk to him. But God doesn't condemn us – he loves us and wants to help us to grow in our relationship with him just as he did for those first disciples.

#### **4. Help!**

The Prayer Course is a simple, practical introduction to a vast and exciting subject. The six sessions cover the simplest foundations of prayer. It's not pitched at seasoned prayer warriors, for whom there are endless specialist books and conferences already, but rather at the vast majority of ordinary Christians who simply want to get better at talking to God and hearing his voice. If there are people in your group who already enjoy a deep and sustaining prayer life, it's advisable to get them 'on-side' before the course starts so that they can help you lead it without feeling patronised. Reassure them that you recognise their spiritual maturity and that you're going to need their help to inspire the group (without dominating or intimidating!)

The basics covered by The Prayer Course are:

1. Purpose in Prayer: Adoration
2. Power in Prayer: Petition
3. Prevailing in Prayer: Intercession
4. Perseverance in Prayer: Dealing with Disappointments
5. Perspective in Prayer: Learning to Listen
6. Partnership in Prayer: Spiritual Warfare

#### **5. Fasten your seat-belts**

When a group of God's people decides that they want to learn to pray, this in itself is the biggest answer to prayer of all, a wonderful sign that the Holy Spirit is already at work, provoking spiritual hunger. Don't worry therefore about having all the answers; it's the questions that count. The apostle Paul reassures us with a stunning revelation that whenever 'we do not know what we ought to pray for ... the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans' (Romans 8:26). What a breath-taking glimpse this is of the prayer meeting going on in heaven right now, in which God himself is interceding not just vaguely for creation but specifically for each one of us. By embarking on The Prayer Course, you are effectively becoming an answer to the Holy Spirit's most passionate, groaning intercessions for the people in your group, which means that he is definitely going to help you every step of the way.

'We must not conceive of prayer as overcoming God's reluctance, but as laying hold of His highest willingness.' – Archbishop Richard Chevenix Trench

## 2. WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW: BUSTING FOUR MYTHS ABOUT PRAYER

There are at least four great myths about prayer which are probably lurking in the hearts and minds of your group and which must be addressed firmly and clearly if we are to help people grow in this vital dimension of Christian faith:

### 1. The first great myth about prayer is that *everyone else is doing it more than you*.

I have lived on three continents, planted three churches, worked with drug addicts, bishops and politicians, preached in cathedrals, slums and student bars, and in twenty years of ministry I have yet to find anyone who finds prayer particularly easy, myself included. The 24-7 movement began when a few of us finally held up our hands, admitting that we were bad at prayer, and got serious about wanting to learn. Since then, hundreds of thousands of others in more than half the nations on earth have joined us, effectively saying 'me too'.

i. **Myth:** Everyone else prays more than you

ii. **Truth:** We all need help

### 2. The second great myth about prayer is that *it always works if you do it right*.

Prayer is not a formula. God is not a slot-machine. Jesus himself experienced disappointments in prayer on at least four occasions<sup>17</sup> and one of his prayers – that the church would be united – remains unanswered to this day.<sup>18</sup> If we are to mobilise people in prayer it is vital that we are honest about past disappointments as well as spiritual victories.

i. **Myth:** Prayers always work if we do it right

ii. **Truth:** Even Jesus lives with unanswered prayer

### 3. Another myth about prayer is that *it changes us but doesn't change the world*.

Meditation and contemplation are valuable aspects of prayer, as we shall see, but the Bible is also full of miracles. On one occasion, when a boy was not healed through the disciples' ministry, Jesus told them explicitly that it was because they weren't praying and fasting enough.<sup>19</sup> God's will is not done automatically. That's why he tells us to pray: 'Your kingdom come'. When we don't pray because we're too busy or can't be bothered or have been fooled into thinking our prayers are of no consequence, God's will may well be thwarted in the lives of those around us. It's not enough simply to wish for good things and then trust God to somehow make them happen. That may sound very spiritual and accepting, but God has called you to discern and actively implement his will through the militancy of prayer.<sup>20</sup>

If we are to mobilise people to pray we must first convince them that their particular prayers can make all the difference in the world. Without our prayerful interventions, marriages may split, sicknesses may prevail and neighbours may continue to resist the gospel. With our prayers, the kingdom advances. There are awesome possibilities when we pray and terrifying implications if we don't. It really is as important as that.

<sup>17</sup> Mark 8:24 – a half-healing miracle / Mark 14:36 – The prayer to be spared the cross / Mark 15:34 – The prayer of forsakenness / The prayer for Christian unity – John 17:21

<sup>18</sup> For more on this subject, see Pete Greig, *God on Mute: Engaging the Silence of Unanswered Prayer*

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 17:21

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 11:12

- i. **Myth:** God's going to do what he wants whether or not you pray
- ii. **Truth:** Your prayers can be a matter of life and death

**4. The fourth myth about prayer is that *some people are just naturally good at it while the rest of us are doomed to flounder in the spiritual shallows.***

All four gospels describe Jesus' burning anger against the traders in the temple courts who were abusing and confusing the whole purpose of the place as 'a house of prayer for all nations'.<sup>21</sup> Here we see how passionately he believed in prayer as an unconditional invitation for everyone, everywhere. It is my solemn conviction that God's blessings are not limited to a special class of super-saints and that every single follower of Jesus is called to join in Christ's ministry of priestly intercession.<sup>22</sup> This means that we can all learn to move in greater spiritual authority.

- i. **Myth:** You will always be bad at prayer
- ii. **Truth:** You can become someone who sees miracles in answer to prayer

It is precisely because no one is born a prayer warrior that anyone can get better at it. God has so much more for you than you currently experience and understand. You can learn to hear his voice in ways you presently only imagine. You can also experience so much more joy than you have known so far in your relationship with the Father. And yes, you can see many more miracles too. How? The trajectory of such spiritual growth really begins for every single one of us on a particular day, in a particular place, with a very simple, humble, five-word admission of need: 'Lord, teach us to pray.'

When the first disciples asked for help in the area of prayer, Jesus responded enthusiastically. God hasn't changed. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If we will just ask him to help us with our prayer lives, the way those first disciples did, he will respond with all his heart, transforming prayer from a guilty 'should' at which we are forever failing into an exciting 'could', accessible, enjoyable and powerful for everyone who loves his name.

**A prayer for those embarking on leading The Prayer Course:**

*Lord, I often talk more about you than to you and I'm sorry.  
I pray for my own prayer life to grow as I lead this group.  
I pray for prayers to be answered through this course.  
I pray for complacency to be replaced by expectancy and disappointment by fresh faith.  
I pray for those who assume that prayer's not their thing to be quietly hijacked by your Holy  
Spirit over the next few weeks.  
Lord, we long for more of your presence, more of your perspective and more  
of your power in our lives.  
Would you please teach us to pray. Amen.*

<sup>21</sup> All four gospels describe Christ's outrage that the temple is failing to function as a House of Prayer for all nations. The synoptic gospels place this event at the culmination of his ministry, just prior to his execution (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). John's gospel positions the cleansing of the temple at the very start of Christ's ministry (chapter 2). Literalists believe that the event must have taken place twice – once at the start and once at the end of Christ's ministry. Other Christians believe that John considered this event so important in defining Christ's mission that he chose to reposition the chronology to make it his opening act, almost like a calling card. Either way, whichever interpretation you favour, this desire for a 'House of Prayer for the nations' must be regarded as one of the most important motivations in Jesus' ministry.

<sup>22</sup> Hebrews 7:25, 1 Peter 2:9, 1 Timothy 2:1

### 3. HOW IT WORKS: OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

#### Who is the course for?

The Prayer Course has been designed to help Christians grow in their prayer lives, both corporately, in church contexts, and privately, in their personal devotions. The course will work particularly well for:

- Church small groups (connect groups/house groups/life groups/cell groups)
- Student groups and CUs
- 24-7 Prayer groups and communities

#### What will I need?

- The Prayer Course video series available at [prayercourse.org](http://prayercourse.org)
- The Prayer Course Cheat Sheets for Group Leaders available at [prayercourse.org](http://prayercourse.org)

#### What does a typical one-hour\* session involve?

\*(NB timings are flexible)

#### WELCOME (5 MINS)

- Help everyone to feel relaxed
- Introduce the theme (and recap previous session)
- Open with a short prayer

#### VIDEO (15 MINS):

#### WATCH!

- The main teaching content for the session. Just plug and play
- Presents the theme and provokes discussion without providing all the answers

#### DISCUSS IT (20 MINS):

#### TALK!

- **The Group Leaders' Cheat Sheets provide:**
- A summary of the video content
- Questions you can use to provoke group discussion
- Useful quotes and illustrations

**DO IT (15 MINS):  
PRAY!**

- **The Group Leaders' Cheat Sheets provide:**
- An appropriate way to conclude the session in prayer
- A prayer with which you can finish the prayer time

**DEVELOP IT (5 MINS):  
HOMEWORK!**

- Wrap up the session
- Explain the personal prayer tool people can use during the week
- Plug relevant resources

**GOING DEEPER: OPTIONAL EXTRA MATERIAL**

You may want to include this Bible study element in the following situations:

- The group discussion is taking time to get going, as may be the case in the early weeks of the course
- You have more than an hour together and you would like to deepen the conversation.
- You would like to extend the course to run for 12 weeks, using the Bible study on alternate weeks.

**DEEPEN IT (20 MINS)  
BIBLE!**

- **The Group Leaders' Cheat Sheets provide:**
- A Bible passage to be read aloud
- 2-3 simple points you can make about the passage
- A question for discussion relating to the Bible passage

This section will also include other material that you might find helpful in deepening the impact of the course. Please feel free to use the parts that are most helpful!

# FURTHER RESOURCES

## BOOKS

### GENERAL PRAYER

- C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm, Chiefly on Prayer*
- Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker*
- Timothy Jones, *The Art of Prayer*
- Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*
- Pete Greig, *Red Moon Rising*
- Philip Yancey, *Prayer*
- Joyce Meyer, *The Power of Simple Prayer*
- *The Alpha Prayer Guide*
- 24-7prayer.com

### ADORATION AND DEVOTIONAL

- Brother Lawrence, *Practicing the Presence of God*
- Dick Eastman, *The Hour That Changed the World*
- St John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*
- Simon Barrington Ward, *The Jesus Prayer*
- Mike Bickle, *Passion for Jesus*
- Gleb Pokrovsky, *The Way of a Pilgrim*
- *Bible in One Year* with Nicky and Pippa Gumbel: [htb.org.uk/bioy](http://htb.org.uk/bioy)

## PETITION AND INTERCESSION

- P. T. Forsythe, *The Soul of Prayer*
- Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth*
- Debra Green, *City Changing Prayer*
- Derek Prince, *Secrets of a Prayer Warrior*
- Eileen Crossman, *Mountain Rain*
- Norman Grubb, *Rhys Howells Intercessor*
- Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*

## UNANSWERED PRAYER

- C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*
- Pete Greig, *God on Mute*
- Phillip Yancey, *Disappointment with God*

## LISTENING AND CONTEMPLATION

- Christine Sine, *Sacred Rhythms*
- Joyce Huggett, *Listening to God*
- Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs*

## SPIRITUAL WARFARE

- C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*
- Ed Silvoso, *That None Should Perish*
- John Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for God*
- John Paul Jackson, *Needless Casualties of War*