

## SESSION 1

# PURPOSE IN PRAYER: ADORATION

### KEY VERSE:

**‘FATHER, HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME’** (LUKE 11:1-2)

### REMEMBER:

- Computer with speakers
- Music for the prayer time

### (5 MINS) WELCOME

#### AIM: TO MAKE EVERYONE FEEL WELCOME

- Introduce the aims of the course and explain how it’s going to work
- Nicky Gumbel, the pioneer of Alpha, says that ‘Prayer is the most important activity of our lives. It is the main way in which we develop a relationship with Our Father in heaven’<sup>1</sup>
- Explain that there will be prayer and discussion times and that we’re all at different places in our prayer lives. However, if anyone would rather not be asked to read a passage from the Bible/share/pray out loud, ask them to let you know
- Open in prayer

### (15 MINS) VIDEO

#### AIM: TO INTRODUCE THE COURSE AND TODAY’S THEME: ADORATION

- Prayer is like a toolbox – there are ‘all kinds of prayers ...’ (Ephesians 6:18)
- Prayer begins and ends in worship – climbing into the arms of the Father. God’s not a slot-machine!

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<sup>1</sup> Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life* (Alpha International, 2010), p. 66

- '(Adoration is) the lifting of the heart and mind to God, asking nothing but to enjoy God's presence' – *The Book of Common Prayer*<sup>2</sup>

### (20 MINS) DISCUSS

#### AIM: TO GET EVERYONE SHARING THEIR THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

- What did you find most helpful in the video?
- What questions did it raise for you?
- (In twos and threes) Describe a great experience of prayer, such as a time you received a clear answer or sensed God's presence
- What do you find hard about praying?
- **Leader's Notes:**  
The best way to facilitate discussion in groups of over five people is to split down into smaller groups of two or three so that everyone gets to speak – not just the more vocal members. When conversation begins to die down, reconvene and take feedback from each group in turn. This means that the 'best' stories will be aired to the whole group and waffle will be condensed.

### (15 MINS) DO IT

#### AIM: TO WORSHIP!

- **Music:** Play some worship music quietly in the background
- **Psalm 103:** Read it together, slowly, one verse at a time
  - » If there is time you could circle the room with each person reading a verse and – if comfortable – praying a prayer of thanks relating to it
- **Open Prayer:**
  - » First allow time to be still and enjoy the peace of God's presence
  - » Then make space for general prayers of worship and thanksgiving

#### **NB:**

If members of your group are not used to praying aloud, there is a simple way of encouraging them to do so. Hand out paper and ask them all to write down a short prayer, explaining that you will then go around the circle systematically, asking everyone to read their written prayer and then to say 'Amen'. By using this model, they will gain confidence and soon abandon their papers altogether!

<sup>2</sup> Text from *The Book of Common Prayer*, the rights in which are vested in the Crown, is reproduced by permission of the Crown's Patentee, Cambridge University Press.

- **Conclude:** You could conclude with a prayer from Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard:

'Father in heaven, when the thought of you wakes in our hearts, let it not wake like a frightened bird that flies about in dismay, but like a child waking from its sleep with a heavenly smile. Amen.'<sup>3</sup>

### (5 MINS) DEVELOP IT

## AIM: TO PRACTICE ADORATION IN THE COMING WEEK USING PERSONAL PRAYER TOOLS

- **Personal Prayer Tool: The Lord's Prayer**

» Invite people to set the alarms on their cell phones for a convenient time each day when they can pray The Lord's Prayer slowly, trying to use each line like a search engine: to explore different ideas, always beginning with adoration and thanksgiving: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name ...'

## GOING DEEPER: OPTIONAL EXTRA MATERIAL

### (20 MINS) DEEPEN IT

## AIM: TO PROVOKE FURTHER DISCUSSION FROM THE BIBLE

- **Read:**

Luke 10:38–42 – The story of Jesus visiting the home of Mary and Martha

- **Explain:**

In Jewish culture, sitting at someone's feet meant you wanted to learn from them. It was the posture of a disciple. Mary wanted to be with Jesus because she looked up to him and knew that he loved her. After twenty years hearing confession, one Catholic priest observed that the most common problem he'd encountered was 'God' because so few Christians really believe that God loves and likes them. 'This is perhaps the hardest truth of any to grasp. Do we wake up every morning amazed that we are loved by God? Do we allow our day to be shaped by God's desire to relate to us?'<sup>4</sup>

- **Discuss:**

C. S. Lewis, author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, said that 'in commanding us to glorify him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.'<sup>5</sup> What do you find enjoyable about God's presence? What compels you to worship? Are there particular moments in your life, particular places, songs, people, or events?

<sup>3</sup> Compiled by Veronica Zundel, *The Lion Book of Famous Prayers* (Lion, 1983), p. 74

<sup>4</sup> David Ford, *The Shape of Living: Spiritual Directions for Everyday Life* (Canterbury Press, 2012), p. 28

<sup>5</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1958), pp. 93–97

## EXTRA RESOURCES USEFUL QUOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

- 'I didn't marry my wife as a child-raising strategy. I married her because I wanted to be with her. One of the wonderful consequences has been children.' – Pete Greig
- 'Who one believes God to be is most accurately revealed not in any credo, but in the way one speaks to God when no one else is listening.' – Nancy Mairs, who has lived with Multiple Sclerosis for more than forty years. <sup>6</sup>
- Adoration is doing what comes naturally. 'I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise ... The world rings with praise – lovers praising their mistresses, readers praising their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favourite game.' – C. S. Lewis <sup>7</sup>
- The great composer J. S. Bach had a tough life – orphaned aged ten, he was once imprisoned for a month and three of his children died ... Bach had many reasons to complain, yet his music overflowed with worship. Eg Cantata #82 'Ich habe genug': 'I have enough! I have taken the Saviour ... into my arms. I have enough.'
- 'Your prayer life is at its best when you pray small prayers continually, rather than big prayers occasionally.' – Pete Greig

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- Video: Bill Hybels, *Coffee With God*  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xU9GR4H0WQ>
- Read: Brother Lawrence, *Practicing the Presence of God*
- Read: Pete Greig, *Red Moon Rising*

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<sup>6</sup> Nancy Mairs, *Ordinary Time: Cycles in Marriage, Faith, and Renewal* (Beacon Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1958), pp. 93–97

## SESSION 2

# POWER IN PRAYER: PETITION

### KEY VERSE:

**‘ASK AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU; SEEK AND YOU WILL FIND; KNOCK AND THE DOOR WILL BE OPENED TO YOU’** (LUKE 11:9)

### REMEMBER:

- Computer with speakers
- Pens and paper for prayer lists

### (5 MINS) WELCOME

#### AIM: TO MAKE EVERYONE FEEL WELCOME

- Recap last time: Adoration is where prayer begins
- Ask people how they have got on with praying The Lord’s Prayer each day. Be sure not to make anyone feel guilty
- **This week:** Petition – asking God for our own immediate needs
- Ask someone to open in prayer
- **NB:** In recapping the previous session try to mention one or two of the particular points made last time by group members: ‘I was so impacted by what Sarah shared ... I’ve been thinking a lot about Tony’s question ...’

### (15 MINS) VIDEO

#### AIM: TO INTRODUCE THE THEME AND PROVOKE DISCUSSION

- God is a good Father who loves to bless us
- ‘Keep it simple; keep it real; keep it up’

- **Traffic lights:**

- » Green – Instant answer
- » Amber – Wait and ‘keep stacking dominoes’. Importance of perseverance in prayer
- » Red – Sometimes God’s answer is ‘no’

**(20 MINS) DISCUSS**

**AIM: TO GET EVERYONE SHARING THEIR THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS ABOUT PETITIONARY PRAYER**

- What did you find most helpful in the video?
- What questions did it raise for you?
- **Traffic light questions**
  - » Green – Has anyone received an answer to prayer this week/recently?
  - » Amber – What are the keys to persevering in prayer?
  - » Red – How do we know when God is saying ‘No’ rather than ‘Wait’?
  - » Describe a time when God didn’t answer a prayer. Can you now understand why?

**(15 MINS) DO IT**

**AIM: TO MAKE SPACE FOR PEOPLE TO LAY THEIR REQUESTS BEFORE THE FATHER**

- Simply share your prayer needs, and even your prayer ‘wants’
- Before praying about them, ask what God’s will might be in this situation. Are there promises in the Bible that relate to the prayer requests?
- Spend time praying for one another’s requests

**(5 MINS) DEVELOP IT**

**AIM: TO PUT OUR LEARNING INTO PRACTICE IN THE COMING WEEK USING PERSONAL PRAYER TOOLS**

- **Prayer Lists:**
  - » The preacher D. L. Moody carried a list of 100 names of people for whom he prayed. Whenever one of them became a Christian, Moody would cross their name off his list. By the time of his death 96 of those 100 people had become followers of Jesus and the remaining four gave their lives to Christ at Moody’s funeral
  - » Hand out paper and ask people to create a prayer list, naming friends, relatives, colleagues and particular personal needs for daily prayer during the coming week. Or you could print out the form on p.5

- **Six Keys for Using a Prayer List:**

1. Try to use your list at the same time every day.
2. Don't worry if your prayers are sometimes very short (even one-liners) or repetitive.
3. Sometimes you may not know what to pray, but you can simply think of the person and offer them to God in prayer.
4. Try to pray specific, bite-sized prayers like, 'Please give me a chance to show them your love today.'
5. Some people may feature on your prayer list daily and others weekly.
6. Review your list regularly and record encouragements.

- **Prayer Dice:**

Alternatively, some people might like to adopt Pete Greig's 'prayer dice' idea. To do this they will need to:

- » Compile a short list of their biggest prayer requests
- » Find biblical promises that relate to each request
- » Memorise the list
- » Buy a dice with the same number of sides as the number of prayer requests

## EXTRA RESOURCES

### USEFUL QUOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

- 'Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the Kingdom.' – C. H. Spurgeon
- 'There are endless problems in our world, but from time to time I still give my children chocolate when they ask for it. Our Father in heaven sometimes gives us our wants, as well as our needs.' – Pete Greig
- 'To know that Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, the Ruler of the whole universe, has his ear open to our personal, individual prayer, that he will do what we ask Him to do, individually, is one of the most exciting experiences anybody can ever have.' – Derek Prince <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Prince, *Secrets of a Prayer Warrior* (Chosen Books, 2009)

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- **Read:** Mahesh Chavda, *The Hidden Power of Prayer and Fasting*
- **Read:** Pete Greig, *Red Moon Rising*
- **Read:** Floyd McClung, *The Father Heart of God*

### (20 MINS) DEEPEN IT

#### AIM: TO UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF PRAYING 'IN THE NAME OF JESUS'

- **Read:** John 14:14, John 15:7 and John 16:23–24
- **Discuss:** What does it mean to 'pray in the name of Jesus'?
- **Explain:**
  - » The name of Jesus is not like Harry Potter's Expelliarmus. It's not a magic word
  - » In Biblical times, a person's name represented their personality, character, reputation and authority. It's the same in business today where one's reputation (we even call it our 'good name') counts for everything and companies spend millions protecting their 'brand'
  - » When we pray to the Father 'in Jesus' name' we are asking on behalf of his Son. God never promises to answer every prayer we utter (which is a great relief). It is the requests made in line with Jesus' character and will which the Father guarantees to fulfill
- **Example:** The Ferrari Enzo is one of the most expensive cars in the world. Only 400 were ever made and they sell for more than a million dollars each. Imagine phoning your local Ferrari dealer and casually asking them to get one in for you to test-drive. They might not agree. But if you were calling on behalf of Bill Gates or a Saudi prince, they would do it. Names convey power and the name of Jesus is by far the greatest and most powerful



## SESSION 3

# PREVAILING IN PRAYER: INTERCESSION

### KEY VERSE:

**‘WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT WE OUGHT TO PRAY FOR, BUT THE SPIRIT HIMSELF INTERCEDES FOR US THROUGH WORDLESS GROANS’** (ROMANS 8:26)

### REMEMBER:

- Computer with speakers
- Copy of newspaper
- Print out three intercession stories (below)

### (5 MINS) WELCOME

#### AIM: TO MAKE EVERYONE FEEL WELCOME

- Last week: Petition
- How did people do with their prayer lists? Did anyone get prayer dice?
- Open in prayer

### (15 MINS) VIDEO

#### AIM: TO EXPLAIN INTERCESSORY PRAYER AND PROVOKE DISCUSSION

- **This week:** Intercession – asking God on behalf of other people, places or situations
- God has chosen to work in partnership with us, principally through prayer
- ‘Let my heart be broken with the things that break yours.’ – Bob Pierce, World Vision

**(20 MINS) DISCUSS**

**AIM: TO DISCOVER HOW INTERCESSORY PRAYER WORKS AND HOW WE CAN DO IT**

- What did you find most helpful in the video?
- What questions did it raise for you?
- Why is it necessary to 'stand in the gap' between God and a situation?
- Sometimes it can be hard to believe that our prayers make any difference. Has anyone experienced the power of intercessory prayer? If so, what were the circumstances?
- What people, places or situations might God be asking us to intercede for?

**(15 MINS) DO IT**

**AIM: TO DO SOME INTERCESSION**

- **Share a little information about a current crisis in the news by:**
  1. Giving 2-3 facts (win minds)
  2. Giving a human-interest story (win hearts)
- **Stand and pray:**  
Invite everyone to stand to raise their voices to God all at once ... What are the promises of God you might claim for this situation?
- **Raising Voices in Prayer:**  
For many Western Christians it can be embarrassing or uncomfortable to raise voices and cry out to God together. Yet the Bible says that Jesus sometimes prayed in a loud voice, and that the early church often 'raised their voices together' in prayer. We also know that this is a model of prayer used extensively in the parts of the world where the church is growing most dramatically, from China and South Korea to Nigeria and Argentina. It is also a great way of praying because it is passionate and efficient – we don't have to wait for others to finish speaking, and God can hear us all at once!
- **Keys to Mobilising This Kind of Prayer:**
  1. Explain what you are asking them to do clearly and why – using the points above.
  2. Give internal processors a moment to think what they want to say.
  3. Put on background music to help people be less self-conscious.
  4. Don't attempt in groups of less than six.

5. Lead by example.
6. The moment that the prayers begin to die off, give the next prayer item.

- **Kneel and pray:**

Finish by inviting people to kneel and pray the 'break my heart ...' prayer, but warn people only to say amen if they really mean it. You could sing/listen to the Hillsong worship track 'Hosanna', which includes these lines:

*I see a near revival  
Stirring as we pray and seek  
We're on our knees  
We're on our knees*

*Heal my heart and make it clean  
Open up my eyes to the things unseen  
Show me how to love like you have loved me*

*Break my heart for what breaks yours  
Everything I am for your kingdom's cause  
As I walk from earth into eternity'<sup>1</sup>*

### (5 MINS) DEVELOP IT

#### AIM: TO HELP EACH OTHER TO INTERCEDE DURING THE COMING WEEK

- **Pray the Papers:** Take a moment to pray into a news headline each day, asking God what he wants in the situation
- **Prayer Walk:** around your workplace or neighbourhood, first asking God to reveal his heart to you for the place, and then praying quietly for what you see
- **Prayer Meeting:** Is there a church prayer meeting you can attend this week?

### GOING DEEPER: OPTIONAL EXTRA MATERIAL

#### (20 MINS) DEEPEN IT

#### AIM: TO PROVOKE FURTHER DISCUSSION FROM THE BIBLE

- **Group A:** Genesis 18:16–19:38 – Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Gomorrah
- **Group B:** Exodus 17:8–13 – Moses intercedes, while Joshua fights
- **Discuss:** What do these stories tell us about how to intercede effectively?

- Ask three people to read out these three powerful stories of intercession in action at the end.

## EXTRA RESOURCES

### USEFUL QUOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

- 'I preach with the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.' – Attributed to Karl Barth, theologian
- 'Speak to God about your friends, as well as your friends about God.' – Pete Greig
- 'Marriages are being shattered. Children are being abused. Individuals are living lives of quiet desperation, without purpose or future. We can make a difference ... if we learn to pray on their behalf.' – Richard Foster<sup>2</sup>

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- **VIDEO:** Watch *Prayer as Justice* video from 24-7Prayer: [24-7prayer.com/video/prayer-as-justice](http://24-7prayer.com/video/prayer-as-justice)
- **READ:** Norman Grubb, *Rhys Howells, Intercessor*
- **READ:** Eileen Crossman, *Mountain Rain*
- **RESEARCH:** Order *Operation World*, the ultimate guide to praying for every nation on earth<sup>3</sup>

## INTERCESSION IN ACTION

### 1. Interceding to Save a Life

Dr Raymond Edmond, a medical missionary to Uruguay, had become so ill that his wife and friends gathered around his bed to say their goodbyes, having already dug his grave outside. But suddenly, much to everyone's surprise, Dr Raymond sat bolt upright, requested his clothes and sprung out of bed completely healed.

Many years later Dr Edmond was preaching in Boston and he recounted this story of the day he was miraculously rescued from death's door. At the end of the meeting an elderly lady approached him clutching a dog-eared old notebook. 'What day did you say you were dying in Uruguay?' she asked. Dr Raymond told her. She leafed through her notebook and eventually located the day, whereupon her wrinkled face suddenly lit up. 'There it is!' she exclaimed, pointing at a scribbled note. 'At 2am God said to me, "Get up and pray – the devil's trying to kill Raymond Edmond in Uruguay!"'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Hearts True Home* (Harper San Francisco), p. 191

<sup>3</sup> [operationworld.org](http://operationworld.org)

<sup>4</sup> Larry Briney, cited *Christian Growth Study Bible* (Zondervan Grand Rapids, 1997), p. 475.

## 2. Interceding to Rescue an Orphaned Child

‘My parents longed to adopt a baby called George from Mexico, but after four years of trying, the Mexican government introduced new legislation and rejected our application completely. We had sent George teddy bears, we had photos and videos of him, and my five-year-old brother often prayed for his new brother. We were all devastated. I’m sure my parents must have felt bad for raising our hopes, but as they prayed and fasted they continued to sense that it was still God’s will for George to join our family, even though we’d been told that this was now utterly impossible.

Around that time someone gave us a prophetic word, saying that God would use kings and queens to move mountains for us. Several months later, a Mexican friend who had been acting on our behalf in the adoption process, happened to meet the wife of the Mexican President. He gathered the courage to tell her about George and she was so moved by the story that she agreed to use her influence to ‘move mountains’.

George is now my brother. He even has a teddy bear signed by the wife of the former president. Looking back, I don’t think it was a matter of begging. I think we received a miracle because, having seen what the Lord wanted to do, we simply kept believing and praying, against all the odds.’<sup>5</sup>

## 3. Interceding for a Nation

By May 1940, Hitler’s forces had cornered 380,000 Allied soldiers in north west France, trapped with their backs to the sea. No more than 30,000 were expected to be evacuated to safety. Facing calamity, King George VI called his British subjects to a national day of prayer.

On 26 May 1940 the beleaguered people of Britain filled churches up and down the land, interceding for the lives of those 380,000 soldiers, crying out to God for the kind of national deliverance described in the Bible. Winston Churchill described the results of that prayer meeting as ‘a miracle of deliverance’.

The first answer to prayer was the weather: the sea was the calmest it had been for 30 years, enabling an armada of private vessels to cross the English Channel to rescue troops from Dunkirk. Meanwhile a storm blew up in France to ground sections of the Luftwaffe. What’s more, Adolf Hitler inexplicably made one of the worst decisions of the war; holding back his forces to enable one of the greatest escapes in history which enabled more than a third of a million men to fight another day and thereby undoubtedly determining the outcome of World War Two.

That ‘miracle of deliverance’ is well known. Fewer people realise that it was an answer to the intercessory prayers that spanned the British Isles on 26 May 1940.

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<sup>5</sup> Joe Row, 2009.

## SESSION 4

# PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER: DEALING WITH DISAPPOINTMENTS

### KEY VERSE:

**“ABBA, FATHER,” HE SAID, “EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE FOR YOU. TAKE THIS CUP FROM ME. YET NOT WHAT I WILL, BUT WHAT YOU WILL”** (MARK 14:36)

### REMEMBER:

- Computer with speakers
- Paper, pens and a receptacle
- Copies of the case studies

### (5 MINS) WELCOME

#### AIM: TO MAKE EVERYONE FEEL WELCOME

- Recap last week: Intercession
- Did anyone manage to try prayer walking or praying through the headlines or attending a prayer meeting?
- **This week:** a subject that affects us all – Unanswered prayer
  - » **Handle with Care:** Be aware of any group members who are going through hard times and may find this session difficult. You could also ask them in advance whether they would like to receive prayer from the whole group.
- Open with prayer

### (15 MINS) VIDEO

#### AIM: TO INTRODUCE THE THEME AND PROVOKE DISCUSSION

- Pete uses the example of a father teaching his son to ride a bike to explain that God's silence is not the same as his absence
- When we suffer we become vulnerable to three particular temptations:
  - » Doubting God's love for us ('Abba Father ...')
  - » Doubting God's power to answer us ('everything is possible for you')
  - » Pretending that we're okay when we're not ('take this cup from me')
- It is only when faith is difficult that we have the opportunity to become faithful – literally full of faith

### (20 MINS) DISCUSS

#### AIM: TO GET EVERYONE SPEAKING ABOUT THE THEME

- What did you find most helpful in the video?
- What questions did it raise for you
- Ask everyone to think of an unanswered prayer that they have had in the past. It could be a small thing, like rain on a wedding day, or a massive thing like an on-going illness. Encourage honesty
- Pete attributes unanswered prayer to three potential causes: God's world (the laws of nature and logic), God's will (he knows best) and God's war (spiritual resistance to the will of God). With the benefit of hindsight, would you now attribute your unanswered prayer to God's world, God's will or God's war?

### (15 MINS) DO IT

#### AIM: TO PUT OUR LEARNING INTO PRACTICE BY PRAYING

- **Pray in Twos and Threes:** Especially about areas of personal disappointment or on-going need. It may be helpful to split men and women to encourage greater honesty
- **Pray Together:** If there is time, bring the group back together and ask them to sit comfortably with open hands, imagining that they are holding their particular need out to God
- **Pray Christ's prayer in Gethsemane slowly, inviting people to adopt a different posture for each line as follows:**
  - » 'Abba Father ...' (place hand on heart and remember God is with you in this and he cares)
  - » 'Everything is possible for you' (clench fists and invite people to take a moment to thank God for his power and the unquenchable hope we have in prayer)

- » ‘Take this cup from me’ (open hands again to God, and invite people very simply, childishly to ask God to take the problem away/or sort it out)
- » ‘Yet not my will but yours.’ (Lift hands to shoulder height in a position of surrender and give people time to express costly trust and faithfulness towards God)

### (5 MINS)

## AIM: TO PERSEVERE AND SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER PRAYERFULLY IN THE COMING WEEK

- If this session has provoked deep emotions or big questions for any members of the group, encourage them to talk and pray further with a trusted friend in the week ahead
- **Lucky Dip Prayers:**
  - » **Explain:** that sometimes it is easier to have faith for someone else than it is to pray about your own problems. That’s why it can be good to share prayer requests with Christian friends, especially if it’s a long-term issue requiring perseverance
  - » **Ask:** everyone to write their name and a specific prayer request on a piece of paper. Place these in a convenient receptacle and ask everyone to take a prayer request and pray for that person daily in the week ahead

## GOING DEEPER: OPTIONAL EXTRA MATERIAL

### (20 MINS) DEEPEN IT

## AIM: TO APPLY THE TEACHING TO REAL-LIFE SITUATIONS

- Give out copies of the two case studies. Ask each group to read the story and formulate a response
- Take feedback

## EXTRA RESOURCES

### USEFUL QUOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

- ‘When we pray, God sometimes does a miracle and airlifts us out of our problems, but more often he parachutes in to join us in the midst of them.’ – Pete Greig
- **Thank God you’re not God:** ‘“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord’ (Isaiah 55: 8)
- ‘The Bible is more honest about unanswered prayer than most churches. Jesus experienced at least three unanswered prayers. And more than half the Psalms are not happy, clappy – they are laments’ – Pete Greig

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- Read: Pete Greig, *God on Mute*

## CASE STUDIES

### CASE STUDY A: CRY BABY

A newborn baby screamed and cried night after night until her parents thought they would go crazy. They prayed desperately that she would stop crying just long enough to let them get some sleep, but their prayers made no notable difference. If anything, praying seemed to make the crying worse and eventually they made a decision to stop asking God for help altogether.

Jim and Molly's crying baby is now a happy, well-adjusted young adult and her parents are dedicated members of their local church. Yet in an honest discussion one evening, Jim opened up about the long-term impact of that simple unanswered prayer on his relationship with God. He admitted that he no longer expects God to answer his most personal prayer requests. So for twenty years he has only prayed for others, almost never for himself. He and Molly still expect the Father to do miracles for other people, just not for them. As Jim finished speaking there was an awkward silence in the room. How would you respond?<sup>1</sup>

### CASE STUDY B: THE HEALING OF A HEADACHE

At your house group meeting you have a bad headache and because no one has an aspirin someone rather self-consciously offers to pray. The group gathers round and joins in, and you feel a little awkward. You also notice that one of the newer people, Sarah, is hanging back. At the end of the evening someone asks how your head is and you realise you're feeling fine. 'Wow, I guess I was healed!' you say and everyone starts grinning and saying things like 'Cool' and 'Praise the Lord'.

Sarah, the new girl, rushes out of the room and you find her in the kitchen in tears. It turns out that when she was twelve her five-year-old brother had died of leukaemia. She describes desperate childhood prayers and chemotherapy and how her mother was never around because she seemed to be at the hospital. Every night Sarah had knelt by her bed and prayed with every fibre of her being for the life of her brother, but he had died leaving a gaping chasm of loss inside. 'Why?' she asks, 'would God heal your headache and let my brother die? It all seems so arbitrary.' Sarah needs love but she also needs real, intelligent answers. What might you say to her?

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<sup>1</sup> Pete Greig, *God on Mute: Engaging the Silence of Unanswered Prayer* (Kingsway Publications, 2007) p. 21.

## SESSION 5

# PERCEPTION IN PRAYER: LEARNING TO LISTEN

### KEY VERSE:

**‘HIS SHEEP FOLLOW HIM BECAUSE THEY KNOW HIS VOICE’** (JOHN 10:4)

### REMEMBER:

- Computer with speakers
- List of ways God speaks

### (5 MINS) WELCOME

**AIM: TO MAKE EVERYONE FEEL WELCOME**

- Last week: Unanswered prayer
- Open in prayer, leaving a minute for silent reflection

### (15 MINS) VIDEO

**AIM: TO PRESENT THE IDEA OF GOD SPEAKING TO US AS NORMAL AND DESIRABLE AND TO PROVOKE DISCUSSION**

- Pete said that prayer is a conversation rather than a monologue and that we can learn to use the bible conversationally and prayerfully
- He also argued that God’s voice isn’t usually weird
- ABC keys to discerning God’s voice:
  - » **Advice** – from wise friends
  - » **Bible** – is it in line with God’s Word and character?

- » **Conscience** – how does it sit with the still, small voice of my conscience and common sense?

### (20 MINS) DISCUSS

#### AIM: TO GET EVERYONE SHARING THEIR EXPERIENCES OF HEARING GOD

- What did you find most helpful in the video?
- What questions did it raise for you?
- Share a time when God spoke to you or guided you. How did you know it was him?
- What are the things that can stop you hearing God?

### (15 MINS) DO IT

#### AIM: TO LISTEN TO GOD FOR ONE ANOTHER

- **Hot-seating:**
  - » Split into threes and ask each group to place one person in the middle while the other two pray for them and share any encouragement, insight or impression they receive from the Holy Spirit. This might be a Bible verse, a mental image or some other word of encouragement
- Offer the following guidelines:
  - » Don't give directional words telling people what to do in the future
  - » Only give words of encouragement and comfort: 'Follow the way of love ... the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort' (1 Corinthians 14:1-3)
- Pray about the things they have shared

### (5 MINS) DEVELOP IT

#### AIM: TO LISTEN TO GOD IN THE COMING WEEK

- Lectio Divina (literally 'Holy Reading') is an ancient way of reading the Bible devotionally, in order to hear God's voice. You might take a single verse and think it through slowly, one word at a time, until its different layers of meaning really emerge. Then pray about what you 'see' and 'hear'
- **How to Do it:**
  - » In the coming week, try to read a Psalm every day. If you do this thoughtfully, one of the verses or phrases in the passage will probably jump out at you
  - » Take that verse and pray through each word or phrase, allowing the emphasis to fall in different ways, so that multiple layers of meaning emerge to fuel your prayers. For example, if you were praying through Psalm 23:1 'The Lord is my shepherd ...'

- » You might first reflect on the fact that Jesus is your 'Lord' and spend time in worship and confession
- » You might then think about the fact that he really 'is' my shepherd, even though you sometimes feel like he isn't
- » Next you could think about him being 'my' shepherd - not just there for other but for me ... etc
- Lectio Divina may sound difficult but it's really simple and flexible. Some people practice it at the gym on a rowing machine where each stroke is another word. Others might journal about a particular verse each day, or take a walk whilst thinking about the words
- **Praying in Tongues:** The apostle Paul says that 'Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves.' (1 Corinthians 14:4). Praying in tongues can be a wonderful way of increasing our receptivity to God's Spirit

## GOING DEEPER: OPTIONAL EXTRA MATERIAL

### (20 MINS) DEEPEN IT

#### AIM: TO PROVOKE FURTHER DISCUSSION FROM THE BIBLE

- **Read:** John 10:1-10
- **Explain:** In the Middle East shepherds lead their sheep from the front and can even call them by name. They don't drive them from behind using dogs the way we do in the West. As a result, the sheep learn to recognise their shepherd's voice. Jesus is saying that this is one of the marks of his sheep. As his followers, we will learn to recognise Jesus' voice in many ways
  - » Ask people to read out each of the 'Ways God Speaks' Bible references listed below
  - » **Feedback:**
    1. What does each one tell us about the ways in which God speaks?
    2. Have you experienced God speaking to you in any of these ways?
  - » **Discuss:** Why does God communicate with us in so many different ways? Try to draw out the following: 1. We're all made differently 2. He wants to teach us to see and hear him everywhere, not just in one particular way
- **Conclude:** We all tend to have preferred ways of hearing God. As well as the revelation that comes through Bible study and preaching, others will hear God's voice while alone in silence, some are dreamers, others hear God through music, creation and through other people. God sometimes stops speaking in a familiar way to draw us into new interactions with him. It's not that he's silent, just that we need to listen in new ways

## EXTRA RESOURCES

### USEFUL QUOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

- What topic could possibly deserve more of our attention than listening to God? When the source of all life and wisdom speaks, those who would be wise listen. The foolish either don't care or don't learn how to listen.' – Dutch Sheets, author<sup>1</sup>
- 'The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend' (Exodus 33:11)
- 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' (Matthew.4:4)
- 'A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realised that prayer is listening.' – Søren Kierkegaard, philosopher

## YOUTH RESOURCE

- **God of the Ordinary** Cut striking photographs from magazines and spread them out in the middle of the room. Avoid religious images. Invite people to choose a picture and then to spend time prayerfully asking the Lord to speak to them through the picture. In pairs share what they 'saw' or 'heard' through the picture

## STORIES

- **The Lord is My Shepherd Story** High on the moors along the Welsh highlands, two ministers met a young shepherd boy who was hearing-impaired and illiterate. They tried hard to help him understand and help him find a personal faith in Christ. They explained the gospel to him, including that Jesus wanted to be his shepherd, and that Jesus would always look after him as he, the boy, looked after his sheep. They then prayed with the shepherd boy. The boy smiled, but it was hard for them to know how much he understood. They read to him the words of Psalm 23 and taught him to repeat the words, 'The Lord is my shepherd', using the fingers and thumb of his right hand to help him remember, starting with his thumb and then a finger for each word.  
Some years later, one of them was passing through that same village and asked after the shepherd boy. The previous winter there had been terrible storms and the boy had died on the hills, buried in a snowdrift. The villager who was telling the story said, 'There was one thing, however, we didn't understand. When his body was discovered he was holding the fourth finger of his right hand.'

<sup>1</sup> Dutch Sheets, *Intercessory Prayer* (Regal 2001)

The minister replied, 'We met the boy last year. In fact, since he was a shepherd boy, we taught him to repeat the first line of the 23rd Psalm, and we told him whenever he said it to himself, to pause at the fourth word, and remember, "this psalm was meant for me."' – Folk tale <sup>2</sup>

- **Divine Distractions** Have you ever had that experience of trying to remember a name or a particular piece of information without success? Then, hours later, when you're thinking about something completely different, the information suddenly pops into your head! When listening to God it's often helpful to ask him the question and then don't try too hard to hear his answer. Instead go do something that is undemanding that will only partially occupy your mind – loading the dishwasher or doing exercise. In this state it is often easier to hear God's voice – you'll be surprised how often his word pops into your head

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- Dallas Willard, *Hearing God*
- Loren Cunningham, *Is That Really You Lord?*
- Joyce Huggett, *Listening to God*
- Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*

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<sup>2</sup> Told by Nicky Gumbel in Bible In One Year Day 50

**(SOME OF THE) WAYS GOD SPEAKS:**

1. Psalm 19:1 .....
2. 1 Kings 19:12 .....
3. Isaiah 30:21 .....
4. 1 Samuel 3:4 .....
5. Luke 1:19 .....
6. Romans 2:15 .....
7. Psalm 119:105 .....
8. Exodus 30:35 .....
9. Acts 16:9 .....
10. Acts 10:11 .....
11. Acts 21:10 .....
12. 1 Corinthians 14:4 .....
13. Ephesians 4:15 .....
14. Romans 8:16 .....
15. 2 Samuel 5:23–25 .....
16. Acts 16:26 .....
17. 2 Peter 2:16 .....

**Answers**

**(Some of the) Ways God Speaks:**

1. Through creation (Psalm 19:1)
2. The 'still, small voice' (1 Kings 19:12)
3. Intuition (Isaiah 30:21)
4. Audible voices (1 Samuel 3:4)
5. Angels (Luke 1:19)
6. Conscience (Romans 2:15)
7. Scripture (Psalm 119:105)
8. Art (Exodus 30:35)
9. Dreams (Acts 16:9)

10. Visions (Acts 10:11)
11. Prophetic words (Acts 21:10)
12. Speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:4)
13. Godly counsel (Ephesians 4:15)
14. Spirit 'bearing witness to our spirit' (Romans 8:16)
15. Natural events (2 Samuel 5:23–25)
16. Circumstance (Acts 16:26)
17. And even through a talking donkey (2 Peter 2:16)

## SESSION 6

# PARTNERSHIP IN PRAYER: SPIRITUAL WARFARE

### KEY VERSE:

**‘FOR OUR STRUGGLE IS NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT AGAINST ... THE SPIRITUAL FORCES OF EVIL IN THE HEAVENLY REALMS’** (EPHESIANS 6:12)

### REMEMBER:

- Computer with speakers
- **Leaders' Note:** Of all The Prayer Course sessions, this is potentially the most controversial, but it is also vitally important. Some group members may be sceptical about the very notion of Satan and demons, while others will know such realities in their own experience. All Christians agree on the reality of spiritual warfare, but we disagree on precisely how to fight! This session is therefore deliberately simple, covering principles about which Christians can all agree.

### (5 MINS) WELCOME

#### AIM: TO MAKE EVERYONE FEEL WELCOME

- Welcome to the final session of The Prayer Course!
- **This week:** Spiritual warfare
- Open in prayer

### (15 MINS) VIDEO

#### **AIM: TO OPEN EYES TO THE REALITY OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE AND HOW TO WIN!**

- No one can be a pacifist in prayer. We are all caught up in a spiritual battle against 'the world, the flesh and the devil'
- We live in the gap between Christ's victory on the cross and his return when suffering and sin will finally be eliminated
- In this gap we pray for God's kingdom to come in salvation, healing, justice, reconciliation and beauty

### (20 MINS) DISCUSS IT

#### **AIM: TO GET EVERYONE DISCERNING SPIRITUAL REALITIES IN THEIR MONDAY-SATURDAY WORLDS**

- What did you find most helpful in the video?
- What questions did it raise for you?
- Discernment of spirits' is one of the spiritual gifts, listed in 1 Corinthians 12
  - » What do you see the Holy Spirit doing in your workplace/school/university/street/family?
  - » What do you see Satan doing in your workplace/school/university/street/family?
- Pete said that it's generally better to 'plant seeds than to pull up weeds'. How can you bless the things you see the Holy Spirit doing?
- How might you live with an 'opposite spirit', neutralising the demonic strategies and cultural strongholds you see?

### (15 MINS) DO IT

#### **AIM: TO WIELD 'THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD' IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

- **Praying the Promises:** 'You will never pray a higher or more effective prayer than when, guided by the Holy Spirit, you go to the Word, find the promise that relates to you and your situation and say "Lord, you've said it; you do it."' – Derek Prince<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Prince, *Secrets of a Prayer Warrior* (Chosen Books, 2009)

- **Promises of God:** Learning to claim the promises of God is one of the most powerful ways we can pray because we then know that we are asking in line with his purposes and wielding 'the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God'
  1. Ask people to think of a particular satanic stronghold in their own lives, their family, workplace or elsewhere in the world.
  2. Now invite them to think of a promise from the Bible that addresses that stronghold.
  3. Remind the group of the authority they have in Christ. Invite everyone to stand and raise their voices together, claiming the promise and addressing it specifically to the issue they are thinking about.
  4. Finish by joining hands and pray for the group, agreeing together for the kingdom of God to come.

### (5 MINS) DEVELOP IT

- **Conclude:** Although this is the end of The Prayer Course, this can be just the beginning of a wonderful, lifelong journey full of great joy. Psychologists say that it takes about forty days to form a habit, so try to persevere with some of the prayer tools taught on this course until they have become 'holy habits, enriching and strengthening your ongoing prayer life'
- We pray from a place of gratitude, hope, faith and victory. Just as prayer begins with adoration, 'hallowed be your name', so it ends, 'the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours'. One day there will be no more spiritual warfare, no more disappointments and listening to God will be easy. Once again humanity will walk and talk with God daily, 'lost in wonder, love and praise'
- Plug the 24-7 Prayer Room or any similar corporate prayer event you are planning

## GOING DEEPER: OPTIONAL EXTRA MATERIAL

### (20 MINS) DEEPEN IT

#### **AIM: TO CONTEXTUALISE OUR CURRENT STRUGGLES IN CHRIST'S VICTORY AND OUR AUTHORITY IN HIM**

- **Read together:** Ephesians 6:10-18
- **Discuss:**
  - » How does the armour give us insight into where/how we get attacked?
  - » How do you practically wield 'the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God'?

- » What do you think Paul means by ‘principalities and powers’ and where do you see these at work in the modern world?
- Today we may see ‘principalities and powers’ at work behind:
  - » human trafficking
  - » governmental oppression and corruption
  - » unbridled greed and consumerism
  - » institutions where abuse or lawlessness has become systemic
  - » multi-national companies that choose to abuse people and the planet even though most of their employees wouldn’t behave that way in their own private lives

## THE ABCD FOR ENGAGING IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

1. **Authority** – remember that you are ‘seated with Christ in heavenly places’.
2. **Blessing** – not cursing. Always remember that you are dealing with real people, loved by God and so try to pray positively rather than negatively. There will be times when you have to address the enemy directly but as a general rule don’t go looking for him. Try to pray good things into people and situations rather than bad things out of them. It is ‘perfect love’ that casts out fear and in Paul’s list of spiritual armour there is only one offensive piece of equipment – the word of God.
3. **Common Sense** – The greatest gift God wants to give to many Christians is common sense. Is there a practical response, or a medical explanation?
4. **Discernment** – The discernment of evil spirits is a vital gift. Sometimes the Lord will help us to know exactly how to pray and what the nature of the problem is. Part of the discernment process may well be conferring with others who are wise.

## EXTRA RESOURCES

### USEFUL QUOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

- A senior demon writes: ‘I once had a patient, a sound atheist, who used to read in the British Museum. One day, as he sat reading, I saw a train of thought in his mind beginning to go the wrong way ... If I had lost my head and begun to attempt a defence by argument I should have been undone. But I was not such a fool. I struck instantly at the part of the man which I had best under my control and suggested that it was just about time he had some lunch ... Once he was in the street the battle was won ... He is now safe in Our Father’s (The Devil’s) house.’ – C. S. Lewis <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (HarperCollins, 2002), p. 3

- '(In Christ) we are set at God's side and lifted up to Him and therefore to the place where decisions are made in the affairs of His government. And this is what takes place in ... Christian prayer ... We then find ourselves at the very seat of government, at the very heart of the mystery and purpose of all occurrence.' – Karl Barth, theologian <sup>3</sup>
- 'And all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.' – Julian of Norwich, fourteenth-century nun <sup>4</sup>

## STORIES

- **Story about 'Principalities and Powers'**

Near the end of the Second World War, a German pastor called Helmut Thielicke preached the following powerful sermon entitled 'deliver us from evil' just days after being liberated by the advancing Allied forces:

'Dear friends, in our time we have had far too much contact with demonic powers; we have sensed and seen how men and whole movements have been corrupted and controlled by mysterious, abysmal powers, leading them where they had no intention of going; we have observed all too often how an alien spirit can ride people and change the very substance of men who before may have been quite decent and reasonable persons, driving them to brutalities, delusions of power, and fits of madness of which they never appeared capable before; ... we sense how real and almost tangible are the evil spirits in the air, seeing an invisible hand passing an invisible cup of poison from nation to nation and throwing them into confusion.'<sup>5</sup>

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*
- Ed Silvoso, *That None Should Perish*

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<sup>3</sup> Karl Barth, *Christian Dogmatics III/3*, p. 287

<sup>4</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (Penguin Classics, 1998), p. 22

<sup>5</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Our Heavenly Father: Sermons on the Lord's Prayer* (Harper & Bros, 1960), p.110.