



For personal and life-group use, across January and February 2023

Written by Angela Chapman

Quoteable quotes

- "Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is daily admission of one's weakness. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart." John Stott
- "Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him." John Wimber
- "Our prayers may be awkward. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference!" Max Lucado
 - "God can handle your doubt, anger, fear, grief, confusion, and questions.
 - You can bring everything to him in prayer." Rick Warren
 - "Prayers outlive the lives of those who uttered them; outlive a generation, outlive an age, outlive a world." E.M Bounds
 - "Prayer delights God's ear; it melts His heart." Thomas Watson
 - "To desire revival... and at the same time to neglect personal prayer and devotion is to wish one way and walk another." A.W. Tozer
 - "The purpose of prayer is not to bend God's will to ours, but to bring our will into conformity with His." Albert Mohler



This sermon series was inspired by and is accompanied alongside, **'The Prayer Course'** by Pete Greig from 24/7 Prayer organisation (*to find the series on YouTube, see the link at end*).

In this course we will be working through **The Lord's Prayer** (Luke 11:1-4, Matthew 6:9-13). The one thing that the disciples explicitly asked Jesus to teach them was to teach them how to pray. They could see that this was the key to everything about their Rabbi's ministry. These disciples went on to have amazing prayer lives and ministries themselves. But they asked for help in this area of their faith journey early on. And that is what we are doing here, asking, 'Lord teach us to pray.'

It goes without saying that Prayer is one of the crucially important elements of our faith journey. Prayer is not only about connection and communication but of course also the more intimate communion with God. We are created by our God for intimacy and abiding in Him. Jesus prayed regularly to his Father, and in the bible this is documented and highlighted on so many occasions. When there was trouble ahead Jesus prayed. When there were times of peace and calm Jesus prayed. When time seemed to be in short supply Jesus prioritised the time to pray. Jesus didn't rush when he prayed. We can learn everything we need to know about our own prayer-lives from watching, listening, following and copying Jesus' habits and patterns around His prayer-life on earth.

Over the next few weeks in our Sermon-Series teachings, and in our Life-Group application times, we can learn about and revisit the delight, and the power, of prayer for us personally and for our groups. The series will be looking at different patterns of prayer and will study various ways we might pray over the next few weeks and way beyond, for life and living. Prayer is not about getting more things from God but getting more of God himself. Getting closer to Him via both word and spirit – it is all of it, intertwined. We can trust God both by talking to him in prayer and learning more about him through His word. We will grow into the faithfulness of God over a lifetime.

We have just learned the truth of this 'growth in faith' in our last sermon series from the book of Habakkuk where Habakkuk learned to trust God and lean into God over time – his story shows his journey from doubt to faith fulfilled. The prayer of Habakkuk shows us that revival is a work of God, not an achievement of man. There is something man can and must do for revival – simply cry out to God and plead for His reviving work.

So, prayer is not just about asking God for the things we need or desire, on a shopping list. It is about establishing a relationship with Him built on faith and trust in Him. God knows the desires of our hearts long before we even think to ask, but he still loves to hear from us, whether we are asking for guidance or giving thanks because it draws us closer to Him. The bible is full of people who were led to pray for a multitude of things that we still pray about today: fear, anger, worry. The bible is full of verses about anxiety, strength and hope. But for those dark days when we may be questioning just how effective prayer really is, these bible verses will help come alongside and get us down on our knees to communicate with our awesome and wonderful living Lord God.



At the end of this 8-week course, it is hoped that it will equip us to be ...

- Better at hearing God's voice
- Better at experiencing more of his presence
- Better at processing some disappointments in our struggle with prayer
- Better at experiencing more miracles because we will be learning how to unlock the power of prayer

And a wise piece of advice about prayer life is ...

Prayer: Keep it simple, keep it real and keep it up!

A selection of key references in the bible about praying:

- Matthew 6:5-8
- Hebrews 4:16
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
- Philippians 4:6-7
- 1 John 5:14-15
- Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4 **The Lord's Prayer**
- Mark 11:24
- Ephesians 6:17-18
- 1 Timothy 2:1
- James 5:16



The Prayer Course – Week 1

Why Pray?

‘Lord, teach us how to pray’ - The Lord’s Prayer – Luke 11:1

We all know that spending time with someone builds a relationship with them. Likewise spending time with God will build a relationship with Him. Everybody would probably relate to praying at different times in their lives, including people that would not call themselves Christians - there are times that we look up to God and give special thanks, or we may cry out in agonising grief or for help in a situation. When you hold a new-born baby and look at the creation of their face and fingers. When you see the wonder of the northern lights. The formation of a spectacular rainbow. The pain and heartache of losing a person close to you.

To be human is to pray. In Latin the word is ‘precaria’ meaning to ask earnestly for or beg – we pray because life is precarious and marvellous, too big for our heads and our hearts to contain. Rabbi Abraham Heschel puts it beautifully, he said, ‘Prayer is our humble answer to the inconceivable surprise of living.’ We talk to God because we know that He knows.

Prayer is a two-way conversation with the living God and He loves and listens to the things we say. Jesus said, ‘Ask anything in my name and it’ll be done.’ We have a chance to ask for peace, healing, help or whatever we need but it’s not just about those things – everything matters - life, choices, our thoughts and prayers and actions all echo in eternity. But God is not always easy to hear – there are distractions, disappointments and questions that we all share. So, learning to pray and connect in new and different ways will help us to fully discover that God is real, that He loves us and that life is a miracle.

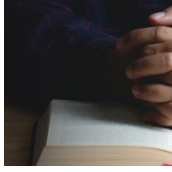
We are taught to keep it simple and pray like this ...

Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV) ‘Our Father in Heaven hallowed be Your name. Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil one.’

Luke 11:2-4 (NLT) ‘Father, may your name be kept holy. May your kingdom come soon. Give us each day the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us, and don’t let us yield to temptation.’

Questions for this session:

1. What did you find most helpful or most challenging in the video?
2. Why do we need to pray to God if He knows our needs already?
3. What do you mostly talk to God about – is it a list of things that you need God to give you, or do for you?
4. What do you find difficult about prayer? What do you find easy? Why do you think prayer can often feel hard?
5. Do you feel like you must act a certain way before God when you pray? Why or why not?
6. Do you find it challenging to persevere in prayer? How can we be encouraged to keep going?
7. How would you like to experience God more?



The Prayer Course – Week 2

Adoration

'Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name'

The Lord's Prayer - Matthew 6:9

In this session we are going to be looking at the opening line of the Lord's Prayer where Jesus teaches us how to address our prayers to 'Our Father in Heaven' and then to pray 'Hallowed be your name.' This is to teach us where prayer really begins, with adoration and worship. Of course, if we need to call out to God for help 'in the moment' then that is ok – just call out for help and God listens. But when we are talking about developing a disciplined deepening prayer life in our own personal quiet times or in church prayer meetings, it is a good idea to start with adoration. It is like looking at the difference between a microscope and a telescope where it is easier sometimes (or our default mode) to look at the tiny detail of only ourselves and our own concerns, how we are feeling and what we are thinking (microscope). But there is a gigantic world out there and a really awesome God who made the complete cosmos (telescope). When we Worship, we swap the microscope for the telescope - it changes our perspective on everything. When we look up at the vastness of the stars that were created by Him, we don't think 'aren't I amazing', instead we get lost in the wonder of their presence there. There is something much bigger than who 'we are.' Jesus teaches us to start our prayers with that attitude – that God is God and He is Holy.

This here is relational not transactional. Come to the Father to give something to Him, not get something from Him. To be in His presence in intimacy – to 'be'.

'Adoration is the lifting up of the heart and mind to God, asking nothing but to enjoy God's presence.' Book of common prayer, 1662.

Questions for this session:

1. What do you find the most helpful or most challenging in the video?
2. God is already a great Father and awesome King - why does He need our adoration and worship?
3. We often go to God and ask Him for things, but what does He ask of us too? Why does He?
4. Why do you think that we most often associate prayer with asking, rather than worship and adoration?
5. What does it mean here to be relational not transactional?
6. Do you enjoy spending time with God? When are the times when prayer feels most enjoyable?
7. What does your adoration of God look and sound like?
8. In the Acts passage, the early church put their own crisis in perspective by worshipping. What are the practical things you could do this week to foster an attitude of worship in your daily routine?



The Prayer Course – Week 3

Petition

'Give us this day our daily bread' – The Lord's Prayer – Matthew 6:11

Petitionary Prayer – means 'a specific form of prayer aimed at making requests of God.' Asking God for Him to give something or to act or intervene for the person praying. This is probably the most instinctive and common form of prayer used by many – reaching out and asking God to help us.

So why do we need to ask God for things or situations when God knows us so well and already knows what we need? Probably because God wants us to ask Him, and articulate our needs before him. It is like the story of Bartimaeus who was blind and wanted to be healed. Bartimaeus scrambled his way through the crowds to get to the front to see Jesus so that he could speak to him. Jesus asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' (even though Jesus knew what he needed already). But Jesus wanted Bartimaeus to acknowledge it and to ask him. Bartimaeus was displaying his faith in Jesus by asking for Jesus' healing power and touch. And as we know, his prayer worked – through his faith, and Jesus' healing power, Bartimaeus was able to see again. Can we still expect things like this to happen today? In the words of the soul band Hot Chocolate 'I Believe in Miracles.' And miracles can and do happen every day in different situations and they are witnessed in the lives of many different people. The more that we get in the habit of prayer, the more we see and experience the miraculous power of prayer.

Matthew 7:7-8 sums up what petitionary prayer really is all about, 'Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds. To him who knocks the door will be opened.'

We should ask. Ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking. Persevere in prayer.

Pray with other people, pray on our own, pray for the big steps or pray for the little steps. Learn to pray God's promises – it is written down for us in the bible so pray along the lines of scripture. Pray in the name of Jesus. And be consistent and persistent with our prayers.

Questions for this session:

1. What did you find most helpful or most challenging in the video?
2. 'Give us this day our daily bread' – what does that actually mean, or include?
3. Can you remember a time when you have asked God for something and He has just given it straight to you?
4. Have you ever prayed for a miracle to happen and it has?
5. It has been pointed out that it's often easier to believe God can change things in our hearts rather than believing in things we can see in the world. Do you agree?
6. How often do you ask God for what you want as well as what you need?
7. Do you feel that God is responding to any of your specific prayers at the moment - with a yes, a no or a wait?



The Prayer Course – Week 4

Intercession

'Your Kingdom come' – The Lord's Prayer – Matthew 6:10

Intercessory Prayer – if Petitionary Prayer (which we looked at last week) is praying about asking for something for ourselves then intercessory prayer is asking God in prayer on behalf of others. We can plead or intervene for other people.

There is a story in the bible where Esther goes to the King and intercedes on behalf of the people of Israel – she is pleading on their behalf.

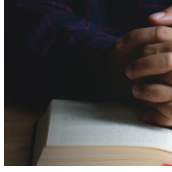
One of the promises in the bible that relates to intercession is in **2 Chronicles 7:13-14** where King Solomon has just finished building the temple. He spends the night in prayer to hear from God. God then says, 'When I shut up the heavens so there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or I send a plague among the people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.' Three words that are so important in this message here are - if, when and then. 'When' things go wrong in life, because they will. 'If' my people will pray, 'then' God says, I will hear from heaven, forgive their sins and heal their land. 'Healing the land' means a transformation of society at every level – it is cultural, financial, political, ecological and it is also about the forgiveness of sins. It is about sanctification and holiness in the church at the same time.

You could say that when the people intercede then God intervenes. This is a pattern that we see throughout the bible and repeated through history - before every major move of the Holy Spirit there is a movement of prayer.

We must therefore, humble ourselves and seek God, and pray for our world right now. The great news is that this is a promise from God. It will work – God's promises are true.

Questions for this session:

1. What did you find most helpful or most challenging in the video?
2. When we intercede and pray for others can we pray for anyone or only for Christians?
3. Can you think of an example when you have interceded on someone else's behalf and you had an amazing answer to your prayer?
4. How do you feel about intercessory prayer – do you find it's something that comes naturally or is it more of a challenge?
5. How does our free will affect the way that we come to God in intercessory prayer?
6. What does it mean to be humble? How do we act that out in our daily prayer lives?
7. Have you ever had a feeling that you needed to pray for something or someone? What happened?
8. How would you pray this week if you said Amen to God's will for your life?



The Prayer Course – Week 5

Unanswered Prayer

'Your will be done' – The Lord's Prayer – Matthew 6:10

Unanswered Prayer is about the disappointments that we may feel when our prayers don't seem to get answered as we want them to be, and within our set timescales. God knows what is best for us and God's ways are not always our ways. And there is the 'mystery' that we live with here on earth in which we will never know all the answers until we are reunited with God in glory. Prayer is not about getting God to say 'Amen' to what we want, but prayer is about us saying 'Amen' to God's will. It is what God wants. And God wants it for our good. God has plans for us, plans that are for our good and our flourishing (**Jeremiah 29:11**). We need to discern what God's plan is for us and pray in line with His will for our lives.

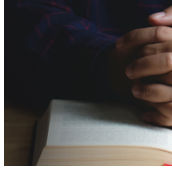
Prayer is the most wonderful thing we can experience and it works, and miracles do happen. But with honesty, prayer can also be a painful thing when the answers don't come. It is not always that simple. And so, we wait patiently. People may die when we have prayed for them and we don't know why God didn't heal them. We are puzzled, and confused in such times. Then we have to try and process these emotions and why this may have happened, so we need to trust in the truth that God is good and he wants the best for us. It is all in the 'mystery' of His amazing plan. **Psalms 30:5** helps us to process these feelings as it says, 'Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning.' Yes, there is night time, and there is weeping but we know that joy comes in the morning. There is a complete knowing about the darkness of life and the tears that flow but also in the belief of the promise of the resurrection that comes in the morning, that follows the death.

The bible is very honest about 'Unanswered Prayer' – around half of the Psalms speak of bitter lament and unfulfillment. And Jesus himself said, 'In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.' **John 16:33**

And even for Jesus, in **Mark 14:32-36** when Jesus is preparing for the cross, in the garden of Gethsemane, he says, 'Abba Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.' Jesus is overwhelmed with sorrow here and is being vulnerable in front of his very closest friends. He was truly suffering in this moment and he chose to pray. He affirms both God's love for Him and God's power in His prayer here.

Questions for this session:

1. What did you find most helpful or most challenging in the video?
2. Have you ever prayed and felt that no answers came as a result of your prayers?
3. What can suffering feel like when your prayers don't seem to work?
4. How has the reality of unanswered prayer affected your relationship with God?
5. God promises, 'I will never leave you, nor forsake you', so where is He in the midst of our prayers?
6. Have you ever felt God's silence/absence in seasons of your life and faith? How did you respond?
7. How do you think we can get better, as communities, at dealing with the realities and challenges of unanswered prayer?
8. How can we encourage one another in 'faithfulness' as well as 'faith'?



The Prayer Course – Week 6

Contemplation

'On Earth as it is in Heaven' – The Lord's Prayer – Matthew 6:10

Contemplative Prayer is about putting the roots down into our relationship with God. It is much more about 'being' than 'doing.' We can pray petitionary prayers and intercessory prayers and we experience 'unanswered prayers' too. So, then we ask some of the deep questions about what really is prayer? and how does it work? What are the deeper dimensions about being rooted in God and not just doing and trying to make things happen?

Back in the 16th Century a Spanish Nun called Theresa of Avila describes contemplation as 'Prayer of quiet, an intimate sharing between friends.' Richard Forster, a Quaker writer describes it as 'A loving attentiveness to God, where talk recedes into the background and that feeling comes to the foreground.' Contemplative Prayer circles the basis of these three themes: 1) it is consumed with God's love, 2) it is mainly a quiet or wordless or silent form of meditation in which we may just enjoy His presence without doing or saying anything, 3) the third thing is that it is experiential rather than logical. It is an intimate sharing, it is a trusted openness, it is a feeling that comes to the foreground. It is like stargazing. It is sitting and enjoying.

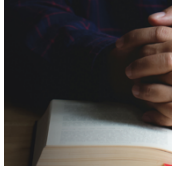
It is not always easy to learn to be still and to be 'present' in that way and in that moment – it takes time to develop this form of deeper prayer. We get so distracted with life's agenda! It may be helpful to focus on a bible verse, a picture or an object. Breathe deeply, slowly.

Contemplative Prayer is biblical – it belongs to us as Christians. In the Old Testament, King David said, 'May the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight' (**Psalm 19**). And, 'For God alone my soul waits in silence' (**Psalm 62**). Famously in **Psalm 46**, 'Be still and know that I am God.' There is something about 'stillness' that enables us to encounter God.

When we meditate or contemplate, we aren't trying to empty our minds, we are seeking to fill them and focus them fully on Jesus. We can do this practically by imagining going through three phases: 1) Meditation: Me and God, 2) Contemplation: God and Me, and then 3) Communion: Only God (your mind is now full of God and you will have lost yourself - see **Matthew 6:6** The Message version). 'Lost in wonder, love and praise' (Charles Wesley).

Questions for this session:

1. What did you find most helpful or most challenging in the video?
2. Do you find it easy to be still and fully focus on Jesus in a particular moment?
3. Have you practised, or do you regularly practise Contemplative Prayer? How does it feel?
4. What do you use to help you focus? Or what might you try?
5. What is your initial reaction to the practice of contemplation? Does it excite you, scare you or bore you?
6. Mother Teresa said, 'It's not how much we do but how much love we put in to the actions that we do.' How does this quote challenge our culture's attitude to social justice or practical action?
7. It can be difficult to make time to pause and contemplate God. What rhythms could you put in place to grow this type of prayer in your life going forward?



The Prayer Course – Week 7

Listening

‘Give us today our daily bread’ – The Lord’s Prayer – Matthew 6:11

Listening to God is the other way round of course from talking to Him. We are designed to walk and talk with God. It is the most natural thing to talk with God and to hear Him speak to us. It is normal to do both and have a two-way conversation. For example, take Moses in **Exodus 33:11** where it says, ‘Inside the tent of meeting, the Lord would speak to Moses face-to-face, as one speaks to a friend.’ And Jesus says, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone but by every single word that proceeds from the mouth of the Father.’

So, this line of the Lord’s Prayer – asking for daily bread, is about listening to God as well as about asking for physical food. If we are not listening to what God is saying to us, we are kind of starved spiritually. In **John 10:27** Jesus says, ‘My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.’ One of the marks of Christians is that we recognise Jesus’ voice. As we build up a relationship with God, we know that it is Him calling.

We can struggle to know whether it’s God’s voice we are hearing or just our own thoughts but over time this can become clearer to us. God speaks to all of us in different ways – for some it is in dreams or pictures, for others it may be in practical actions or audibly.

In the story, **1 Samuel 3:1** Samuel kept waking at night and going into Eli thinking that he was calling him. Eli kept sending him back and said that he hadn’t called him. He suggested that he answers to God if he hears the voice again. God does not give up but keeps speaking and calling to Samuel. Samuel eventually answers him saying, ‘Your servant is listening.’

So, how do we get better at hearing from God? Two simple tips, 1) Slow down – God is not in a hurry – build quiet time into our daily lives, to pray and read the bible, and 2) Soften up – and don’t allow your heart to harden to the daily things of life.

When you think that you have heard from God (but not sure) you can apply ABC – get Advice (from a trusted Christian), Bible (is it in line with the character of Jesus) and Common sense (does the word make sense and seem real and true).

Questions for this session:

1. What did you find most helpful or most challenging in the video?
2. When you pray, do you talk to God and ask for things or do you sit and listen to Him too?
3. In which ways do you feel that God speaks, or has spoken to you in the past?
4. Maybe it would be useful to keep a journal and jot down the things that you feel God may be saying to you over a period of a week or two – maybe a pattern will form over time.
5. Do you feel like your connection to God’s voice is like ‘wi-fi’, ‘cell-phone’ or ‘snail-mail’? Do you find it’s obvious when God is speaking to you?
6. Do you experience hearing God’s voice in a specific way? If so, how?
7. What practical actions could you take this week to slow down and make time for listening to God?
8. How can we encourage one another to ‘keep our hearts soft’ in the busyness of our daily lives?



The Prayer Course – Week 8

Spiritual Warfare

'Deliver us from the evil one' - The Lord's Prayer – Matthew 6:13

Spiritual Warfare is the Christian concept of the fighting against evil forces. In **Ephesians 6:12** Paul tells us that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil. We are fighting a spiritual war with an enemy whose primary tactic is deception. But don't worry God is with us, fighting the battle for us – and He has the victory. Paul talks about spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6 and Priscilla Shirer (in her book - *The Armor of God*) notes that prayer is the seventh piece of armour. It activates all the rest of the spiritual armour. Prayer is the divinely authorised mechanism God has given us to tap into His power. Without prayer we will be ineffective in spiritual warfare. But with it we will be victorious.

Jesus launched His whole ministry with forty days of spiritual warfare in the wilderness **Matthew 4:1-11**. And then the apostle Peter says, 'Your enemy the devil is like a roaring lion. He prowls around looking for someone to swallow up' **1 Peter 5:8**. We get tempted by things in life that we shouldn't do, so we need to pray against these things.

Karl Barth said (of spiritual warfare), 'In Christian prayer ... We find ourselves at the very seat of government, at the very heart of the mystery and purpose of all occurrence.'

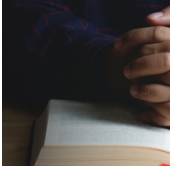
This is a much bigger view of prayer than just 'please give me a new bicycle.' This is saying that in prayer you take authority, that you are seated with Christ in heavenly places, that the power is released through praying. We are partnering with God to exercise His authority and to advance His kingdom.

Jesus has already won the battle, He has the victory – Satan was defeated at the cross – so why do we need to pray? We still pray 'Thy Kingdom Come' – and we pray it from a place of victory while we are in this gap between the resurrection and the return of Jesus.

For this reason, in the Lord's Prayer we are taught to pray 'deliver us from the evil one.' And it is so important to preach the victory of Jesus Christ too.

Questions for this session:

1. What did you find most helpful or most challenging in the video?
2. What does it make you feel to know that there is a battle going on in the spiritual realm?
3. Have you ever felt under any spiritual attack?
4. How do you think we should best go about defeating the evil one?
5. How do you find that you approach spiritual warfare: do you relate to any of the worldviews of the Sadducees, Essenes or Pharisees?
6. How do we get the balance right between the reality of spiritual warfare and focusing on Jesus?
7. How does the reality of praying in 'God's Kingdom to come' affect the way that we do spiritual warfare?
8. What are the strongholds (greed, arrogance etc) in your home, work or community context? How can you live in the 'equal but opposite spirit' this week?



The Prayer Course Resources

Resources for these sessions:

- **The Prayer Course – Sessions 1-8** (get them on YouTube – see the link below)
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQyhbzw8ye2BkqdrVOXk-2MdfA7hGix5Z>
- **Book - How to Pray: A simple guide for normal people** - by Pete Greig
- **Why do people pray? Short animation** – YouTube ... 24/7 prayer.com
- **Book – God on Mute** (about Unanswered Prayer) – by Pete Greig
- **Book – Contemplative Prayer** – by Thomas Merton
- **Book - Spiritual Disciplines** (Chapter on Prayer) – by Richard Foster

The Prayer Course – YouTube links:

- Find each of the separate videos (20mins each) – Sessions 1-8 on YouTube at ...
- <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQyhbzw8ye2BkqdrVOXk-2MdfA7hGix5Z>
- Session 1 – How to Pray
- Session 2 – Adoration
- Session 3 – Petition
- Session 4 – Intercession
- Session 5 – Unanswered Prayer
- Session 6 – Contemplation
- Session 7 – Listening
- Session 8 – Spiritual Warfare

Extra Resources for this course:

- **The Toolshed** <https://prayercourse.org/toolshed/>