

A-Z of Prayer Course

Week 2 of 6 weeks

Before You Start

This 6-week course will take us on a whistle-stop journey through many aspects of prayer. We'll be guided by Matthew's simple book, *A-Z of Prayer*. You will get most out of this course if you've read the relevant chapters before-hand. However those who haven't will still be able to engage with the material.

Each weekly session is designed to take 70 minutes (ie. 1 hour and 10 minutes), so do make time for this. This allows 10 minutes for discussion on each section, which is not long. So the leader should be mindful of this in leading, prayerfully considering when it's right to move on, or whether it's important to stay a little longer on a particular section.

Week 2 - Learning to Pray

This week we'll look at some of the basic elements to prayer.

Preparation

Before you meet, read chapters C, D, E, F and G of *A-Z of Prayer*.

Begin (10 mins)

Ensure that everyone is welcomed and encourage them to keep pursuing the adventure of prayer. You might like to ask how their reading about prayer, and especially their practice of prayer, is going.

Start with the leader reading Matthew 6:5 and reminding everyone that Jesus said 'when' you pray, not 'if' you pray, which means he assumed prayer is something that all disciples do. Then pray for everybody, that the Spirit of Jesus would continue to be our teacher as we learn to pray.

Discussion (50 mins - ie. about 10 minutes on each)

1. C is for Confession

Talk in small groups about saying 'sorry.' Why do some find it so difficult? What about saying sorry to God - is that difficult? Read 1 John 1:8-2:2. Is there a truth to believe? Is there an action to put into practice? Is there something to praise God for? What help would you give anyone in the group who doesn't feel forgiven for something they've done wrong?

2. D is for Devotion

Read Luke 10:38-42. What was Martha doing? And what about Mary? Talk about which you most identify with and why. Devotional prayer is about being Mary-like, and giving time to being in the presence of Jesus, listening to him, drawing close, resting and enjoying his company. It would be good for one or two people to share how they do this. Before moving to the next letter, pause and ask for the Spirit's help to make time for this in the coming weeks.

3. E is for Extemporary

Extemporary prayer is about chatting with God with unprepared words. It's the language of friendship. It's the language of someone who doesn't mind if the words used aren't fully polished or professional. Read Psalm 116:2, which is one of many bible verses about people 'calling on the Lord.' Talk in the group about your experiences of doing this, not using pre-prepared words, but conversing from the heart. What advice would you give to someone who finds this hard?

4. F is for Fasting

Do the short study at the end of the Chapter F, from Acts 13, which is:

Read Acts 13:1-3. This describes the dynamic church in Antioch. What according to v2, was the church doing when they gathered? What, according to v2, did the Holy Spirit do in response?

What does v3 say the disciples then did? What do we learn about fasting from this passage? Talk about your experience of fasting to date and how you might begin to exercise this form of prayer.

5. G is for Gratitude

Who's the most grateful person you know? What are they like? Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18 and share how we can do this. Why should we be thankful people? What do you make of Matthew's suggestion that 'a life touched by grace should be a life marked by gratitude'? Talk about how we can cultivate gratitude and encourage it in each other.

Pray (10 mins)

End this session by praying some prayers of confession and then thanksgiving. Make some space for both. Don't rush the confession prayers. Leaders could encourage people to pray phrases from Psalm 51. Then move to thanksgiving, using a mixture of bible prayers (eg from Psalms 100 or 138) and extemporary prayers. End by asking the Lord to help each one learn more about prayer and get to know God more deeply in the coming days.