

A-Z of Prayer Course

Week 1 of 6

Before You Start

This 6-week course will take us on a whistle-stop journey through the world 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 1 - Introducing Prayer

We change the world through prayer and action. Both are important. But it all starts with prayer. That's why Matthew often says that nothing of lasting significance happens without prayer.

This is the first week of the 6-week *A-Z of Prayer Course*. Today we will introduce the topic of prayer.

Preparation

Before you meet, read chapters A and B of *A-Z of Prayer* and, if you have time, any of the Foreword, Preface and Introduction.

Begin (15 mins)

The leader should ensure that everyone is welcomed. Go round the group and make sure everybody knows each other's names. Then go round the group again and ask people to share a fascinating fact about themselves. Now go round one final time, and ask everyone to share a word or phrase that comes to mind, when they think about prayer.

Talk about this course. The leader should make it clear that we don't have to have read the relevant sections in *A-Z of Prayer* to be able to engage with this prayer course, but that it helps. The most important thing is that we pray, and use the course (and the book) to go deeper in prayer.

Start by reading Luke 11:1, and then pray for everyone, that together our prayer would be that of the first disciples: 'Lord, teach us to pray' and that God would answer that prayer.

Introduction (20 mins)

Talk in pairs or threes, sharing your hopes for this course. Then try to answer the question 'what is prayer?' Do your best to describe it and define it in as few words as possible.

Now get people back into one group. There's no final definition of prayer, but Matthew's book is based on the definition of 'conversations with God.' It's conversing, which is

mainly verbal but can also be non-verbal. It's 'with' God, so it's two-way. Discuss this definition.

In the Preface Matthew says that 'In the Western Church, and particularly in the UK where I live, the Lord is calling his church to return to its foundations and do a few things well - one of which is prayer.' What do you make of this?

Discussion (20 mins)

1. A is for Adoration

Read Matthew 6:9 and talk about how Jesus tells us to start our prayers by adoring God. We're to give him our love, because he first loved us, by creating us, providing for us, and then by sending Jesus Christ to die, rise and ascend for us. Do you pray adoration prayers? If so, how? Talk about what you do or say, and what happens when adoration is difficult. How can we encourage each other to pray in this way?

2. B is for Belief

The Bible says that faith (belief) is important when it comes to prayer (note: faith and belief are from the same root word). Read Mark 11:24 and talk about praying from a place of belief. In his book Matthew defines faith simply as 'belief that God will.' Is this helpful? Testimony builds faith, so spend a few minutes sharing stories of answered prayer. Sometimes when we pray we approach God with much faith, but there are other times that we and others have little or none. Read Matthew 17:20-21 and talk about how much faith is needed for God to work.

Pray (15 mins)

End by spending some time in worship and prayer. Encourage everyone to participate, praying from the heart. Encourage everybody to pray something during the prayer-time, even if it's just a few words. If you've not already done so, spend the first few minutes giving God adoration, and telling him what you appreciate about him. You might like to sing a song. Give him your love. Then turn into small groups and share a few things you'd like prayer for. If you feel you haven't much faith for the situations, be brave and pray anyway. Trust that God will use the little faith you have, and do something wonderful. End by encouraging people to share next time what you've been discovering about prayer.