

one thing for us

Study Guide

This workbook contains information and activities to help you make the most of the course.



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Introduction

Welcome to the 'One Thing' Prayer School series. We're delighted that you've decided to join us on this journey of learning more about prayer. We'll be reflecting together on how prayer shapes our own lives, and how it impacts our churches and communities. As you use this material, our prayer is that you will be encouraged and informed, challenged and inspired.

Why 'One Thing'? There are certain things we know we need to prioritise in life, but all too often busyness takes over, unexpected things happen, and before we know it, we've run out of time to do that 'one thing' we always meant to do. The writer of Psalm 27 probably knew what it was like to be busy and distracted, but he also knew what mattered most of all to him. He wasn't going to let anything else get in the way of the one thing he was pursuing: to dwell in God's temple all the days of his life.

The God of the universe wants us to live out our lives right in the centre of his presence – dwelling in his house. He wants to be in continual conversation with us! If our 'one thing' priority was to embrace the relationship he longs to have with us, surely everything else in our lives would fall into place. 'One Thing for Us' explores how we can put communing and communicating with God at the centre of our lives.

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Getting the most out of 'One Thing for Us'

The course consists of six recorded sessions, each lasting between 50 and 60 minutes. Each session consists of a 30- to 40-minute teaching seminar, interspersed with interviews with people whose stories illustrate the theme of the teaching. Each session also includes 'Pause Points' – moments when you are invited to pause the recording and spend time in discussion or reflection.

To get the best out of 'One Thing for Us', we recommend that you use the recorded sessions in conjunction with this Study Guide. It contains all the discussion questions for each session, as well as suggestions for other exercises you might like to do, to help you explore the themes more fully.

Group Settings/Leader

If you intend to use 'One Thing for Us' in a group setting, we would strongly recommend that the group leader watch the recorded sessions first. This recommendation goes particularly for Sessions 4 and 5, which tackle emotional and spiritual obstacles to going deeper in prayer. Some of the teaching and stories touch on potentially painful subjects, and it would be wise for the leader to be aware of these things in advance.

Leaders are also advised to read the relevant section of this Guide before running each of the sessions, so as to choose suitable activities and discussion questions in advance.



Leader-guided activities are indicated by the symbol above.

Recorded Sessions

This Guide contains an outline for each recorded session, giving you a running order, along with timings for each item. Each outline also gives a suggested structure for using the material with a group: recommended timings for opening worship, Pause Point discussions and closing prayer. Items which form part of the recording are shown in normal font, whereas items which are suggested as *group activities* are shown in *italicised font*.

Questions

The Guide includes the discussion questions suggested in the recorded sessions, but it also includes some extra questions which you may find it useful to use in addition to, or instead of, the ones suggested in the teaching. It also gives suggestions of activities you could use with the group for each session. These are of course only recommendations, and we hope you will feel free to adapt them as you need to, or make up your own. You will be unlikely to have time to do all the suggested activities, so choose the ones which you feel best suit the group.



Discussion questions are indicated by the symbol above.

Timing

Though it takes less than an hour to watch each of the recorded sessions straight through, we strongly recommend that you set aside a minimum of two hours for each one. This gives time for discussion, reflection and prayer, and makes the learning experience richer.

You may even find that you want to split each session into two parts, so as to give more time for conversation on each topic. A line part-way down the session outline for each session gives an indication as to where you should split each one. We strongly recommend splitting Sessions 4 and 5, which are the most densely packed, and which tackle some sensitive subjects. The material may be better digested at a slower pace.

However, we don't recommend splitting Session 1, as the interruption in continuity may make it harder to follow the teaching. If you want to take more time to study it, we recommend running it over a morning or afternoon, giving three hours or so to work through the material. A longer time together could also prove a good way to start a new course on prayer, giving participants the opportunity to spend more time together and to get to know each other.

Though it is not necessary for everyone in your group to have a copy of this Study Guide whilst following the course, it is possible to download a pdf version from our website, should you wish to make it available to them.

You can find a link to download the Study Guide, along with more 'One Thing' resources by visiting The Salvation Army's Prayer Resources page at: www.salvationarmy.org.uk/prayer-resources



Session 1

Prayer and Personality

‘There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful, than that of a continual conversation with GOD: those only can comprehend it who practise and experience it; yet I do not advise you to do it from that motive; it is not pleasure which we ought to seek in this exercise; but let us do it from a principle of love, and because GOD would have us.’ (Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God: The Best Rule of Holy Life*)

Prayer is powerful and important. You probably wouldn't be doing this course if you didn't believe that. Yet for many people, the experience of prayer falls way short of that 'sweet and delightful life of continual communication' which Brother Lawrence described. Why is that? Is it because we're bad at it, or because we're not trying hard enough?

Church history is full of people who seem to have been brilliant at prayer. We read their stories and we resolve to do a bit better – to work a bit harder – to become one of those impressively prayerful heroes of the faith. Yet, 24 hours later when we've slept through the alarm, fallen out with our work colleagues and opted for the TV instead of the prayer closet, we find ourselves back at square one, feeling defeated and discouraged.

Prayer isn't a formula we get right. It is a relationship we pursue. It works best when we are being ourselves, rather than trying to be someone else. God made us unique, so our relationship with him will be unique. In this session, we learn how our personalities affect the way we connect with God, and we explore ways in which we can be more 'ourselves' when we pray.

Session 1

Outline

Welcome and Worship	35 Mins
Presenter's introduction	7 Mins
Talk Part 1: Praying the way God made you	7.5 Mins
Pause Point: Discussion question 1	5 Mins
Talk Part 2: Sunbather	7 Mins
Story: Caroline Agoi	1.5 Mins
Talk Part 3: Surfer	7 Mins
Story: Bruno Lionnet	0.5 Mins
Talk Part 4: Ice-cream Seller	7 Mins
Story: Doreen Laven	2 Mins
Talk Part 5: Snorkeler	7 Mins
Story: Major Alan Bateman	1.5 Mins
Presenter's link	0.5 Mins
Pause Point: Discussion question 2	10 Mins
Story: Tim Reynolds	1 Min
Presenter's Conclusion	0.5 Mins
Prayer and Close	20 Mins

If running this session over three hours, break the teaching up with Pause Points before parts 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the talk. Use the relevant activity from the Prayer Styles Prayer Meeting (overleaf) to introduce each beach character.

Session 1

Activities, Discussions and Reflections

Scriptures in the Teaching

John 15:4-7; Luke 10:38-42; Luke 9:28-36; Mark 2:1-5; John 3:1-16



Discussion Questions

1. What do you most love doing when you go to the beach?
2. How can you be more 'you' in your prayer life?
3. Which prayer style do you think best fits you?
4. Talk about some of your best and worst experiences of prayer.
5. Which prayer style is used most often when your church prays together?



Getting Ready

- Spend some time talking about people's hopes and expectations for the 'One Thing for Us' course.
- Play some music and invite each person to talk to God (silently) about how their prayer life is going at the moment: to give thanks for the good things, to be honest about the frustrations and to ask him to do something new in the weeks to come.



Prayer Styles Prayer Meeting

1. Sunbather

Give each person an empty cup, representing their life. Invite them to hold it upside-down and to imagine pouring away all those things they have done wrong. Then ask them to turn it the right way up, and to imagine God filling them with his love and power. Finally, fill the cups with water and invite people to drink it slowly, as they reflect on what it means to have God's resurrection life in them.

2. Surfer

Get people into pairs and give each person a piece of A4 blank paper and a pen. Ask them to think of something encouraging they'd like to say to their partner, then to draw or make it with their piece of paper (no words allowed). After two minutes, ask them to give each other their creations and explain what they mean.

3. Ice-cream Seller

Get people into groups of three and give each person a pen and a Post-it Note. Ask them to write down a situation which needs prayer, noting three specific things they'd like God to do to make that situation better. Ask everyone to pass their Post-it Notes to the person on their left, who will say a prayer for the situation, then put the note in their Bible, wallet or prayer journal as a reminder to keep praying throughout the week.

4. Snorkeler

Give each person a page or part-page of a newspaper. Invite them to spend a few minutes reading one of the stories on it, then ask them to formulate a prayer for the situation they've just read about. Then invite people to pray their prayers out loud for the whole group to hear.

Prayer:

Father God, you welcome us to come home to you
to live our lives in the shadow of your loving presence;
Stir in our souls a hunger for your company.
Jesus Christ, by your death you opened the way for us to be
forgiven and redeemed;
You rose to life again so that we could live in hope and freedom;
Stir in our souls the faith to pray for miracles.
Holy Spirit, you fill us with power
And you spur us to action;
Stir in our souls a passion to build the Kingdom.
Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
We humbly ask you: teach us to pray.
In Jesus' name, Amen.
(Lyndall Bywater)



Session 2

Listening to God

There are few things more welcome in life than the voice of someone you love. It's instantly recognisable – just a brief 'hello' and you immediately know who it is. It's instantly soul-cheering – it can change your mood from doom to delight in a heartbeat. If that's the effect which the voice of another human being can have, imagine what hearing the voice of God might do for your day.

This session is all about how to listen to God and to hear his voice. If the 'one thing' we're seeking in this life is a deeper relationship with God, then it would certainly help a lot if we could recognise him when he speaks to us, wouldn't it?

Prayer is a two-way conversation. God never meant us to feel like we're talking to a brick wall; he always meant us to be able to hear him speaking to us just as clearly as we hear the voices of our loved ones when we talk to them.

The Bible is full of God speaking to people. If you ever thought he was the strong silent type, think again. Of course, he can be silent at times, but it's a rare thing. Most of the time he is talking. But how does he speak? If you're listening for an audible voice, then you may be disappointed. The God who made the universe is definitely not restricted to speaking the same way our friends and family do. He can communicate with us in any number of different ways. When you start listening to God, you realise he's the ultimate in multimedia.

The most important thing to remember, though, is that he loves to talk to his children – and that includes you.

Session 2

Outline

Welcome and Worship	25 Mins
Presenter's Introduction	2 Mins
Story: Commissioner Clive Adams	1 Min
Talk Part 1: How does God speak? (1)	16.5 Mins
Pause Point: Discussion question 1	10 Mins
Story: Hannah Nandra	1.5 Mins
Talk Part 2: How does God speak? (2)	6 Mins
Presenter's Link	0.5 Mins
Pause Point: Discussion question 2	10 Mins

Story: Commissioner Clive Adams	1 Min
Talk Part 3: How do we listen?	15 Mins
Presenter's Link	1 Min
Pause Point: Discussion question 3	10 Mins
Story: Commissioner Clive Adams	2.5 Mins
Presenter's Conclusion	2 Mins
Prayer and Close	15 Mins

How does God speak?

S = Spirit; P = People; I = Inspiration; E = Experience; S = Scripture

How do we listen?

Still, Open, Obedient, Reflective (Position of the Bible, Peace of Christ, People of God)

Session 2

Activities, Discussions and Reflections

Scriptures in the Teaching

2 Corinthians 5:18; John 16:13; Acts 13:2; John 10:27; 1 Corinthians 2:14-15; Mark 3:14; Acts 11:28; Job 38:25; Psalm 119:67; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Psalm 46:10; Zechariah 3:17; Isaiah 40:12-14; Psalm 66:18; Hebrews 4:16; Mark 11:25; James 4:6-7



Discussion Questions

1. What gets in the way of you hearing God?
2. Tell the story of a time when you have heard God speaking to you.
3. What could you do to help you hear God's voice more?
4. How do we know if we've heard God correctly?
5. When and why might God remain silent? What should we do in those situations?



Talking about the God who speaks

- Lay out a selection of images of Jesus and invite each person to choose one which they feel particularly drawn to. Give a few minutes' silence for people to contemplate their picture, and to reflect on what it says to them about Jesus. Then invite people to get into pairs, to share their pictures and reflections.
- Play a film clip which shows someone acting the part of God (Morgan Freeman in 'Bruce Almighty' for instance). Talk together about what kind of God we see portrayed in films and TV programmes.



Prayer Activities

1. God in the Everyday
Ask each person to take something 'everyday' out of their pocket or handbag (keys, phone, wallet etc.). Then pray a simple prayer, asking God to speak to

each of you as you open your ears to listen to him. Then give just one minute of silence, and ask each person to note the first thought that comes to their mind as they look at the object in their hands – it doesn't have to be deep or serious! Then invite each person to share the thought they noted. It's surprising how much of God's voice will come through as you talk together.

2. Encouragement Consequences

Give each person a piece of A4 paper and ask them to write their name at the bottom. Then get everyone to pass their paper to the person on their left, who will ask God to give them one encouraging word, phrase or Scripture verse to write at the top, before folding the top section over (so it can't be seen), and passing the paper on to the person on their left. Continue until each person's paper has at least four encouragements on it, or until it has been round the whole group. Then return everyone's paper to them and give them a few minutes to read and absorb the encouragements written there.

3. Listening Walk

Go for a brief walk around the neighbourhood, asking God to show each of you something significant which he wants you to notice about your community. When you get back, talk about what you noticed, and pray for your community.

4. Listening through Lectio Divina

Read a Bible passage out loud to the group, and invite each person to notice and write down one word or phrase which particularly stands out to them. Read the passage through twice slowly, to give everyone chance to hear God. Then ask each person to share the word or phrase they wrote down.

Prayer:

Look upon us, O Lord,
and let all the darkness of our souls
vanish before the beams of
thy brightness.

Fill us with holy love,
and open to us the treasures
of thy wisdom.

All our desire is known unto thee,
therefore perfect what thou hast
begun, and what thy Spirit has

awakened us to ask in prayer.

We seek thy face,
turn thy face unto us and show
us thy glory.

Then shall our longing be satisfied,
and our peace shall be perfect.

Amen.

(Fifth-century prayer of St Augustine)



Session 3

Prayer Rhythms

Ever since the earliest days of the Church, Christians have known that prayer isn't something that 'just happens.' It has to be timetabled in, otherwise it gets lost in the busyness of life. So church communities down the centuries have put in place prayer rhythms – regular times of day when everything else stops so that prayer can take centre-stage. The churches, chapels and cathedrals dotted throughout our land aren't just beautiful buildings to remind us of our past and to wow the tourists – they're homes for communities of God's people who have maintained a strong, regular heartbeat of prayer down the ages.

It's a feature of our high-tech world that we can track time in great detail with great accuracy. In centuries gone by, you might have known it was roughly noon by the ringing of the bells on the church clock, but now you can pinpoint noon to the very second. It's also a feature of our 21st-century lives that we seem to be trying to fit more and more into the 86,400 seconds available to us in each 24-hour period. Sometimes it can feel as though our lives are governed more by the alarm clock, the timetable, the microwave timer and the reminders on our phones than by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

In today's session we're talking about how to build a rhythm of prayer in our lives... how to make some spaces in the day so that we can stop and talk to our Father in Heaven, rather than just shouting to him as we dash by on the way to our next meeting.

As we discovered in Session 1, our prayer lives vary according to our personality, and building a prayer rhythm is a very personal thing. There are no right or wrong ways to do it. It is simply a matter of setting aside regular times to talk with God, and it starts with the astonishing knowledge that he loves our company, and looks forward to those times even more than we do.



Session 3

Outline

Welcome and Worship	30 Mins
Presenter's Introduction	5 Mins
Story: Gordon Taylor	2 Mins
Talk Part 1: Why do I need a prayer rhythm?	5.5 Mins
Pause Point: Discussion question 1	10 Mins
Story: Major Jill Miller	1.5 Mins
Talk Part 2: Building a prayer rhythm (1)	5.5 Mins
Story: Gordon Taylor	1 Min
Talk Part 3: Building a prayer rhythm (2)	5 Mins
Pause Point: Discussion question 2	10 Mins
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Story: Major Alan Bateman	3.5 Mins
Talk Part 4: Creating a prayer template	4.5 Mins
Pause Point: Discussion question 3	10 mins
Story: Vicki Tate	3 Mins
Talk Part 5: Beyond rhythm to lifestyle	3.5 Mins
Story: Gordon Taylor	2 Mins
Presenter's Conclusion	1.5 Mins
Prayer and Close	15 Mins

Session 3

Activities, Discussions and Reflections

Scriptures in the Teaching

Luke 4:42; John 17:21-23; Numbers 6:24-26; James 5:13-16



Discussion Questions

1. How do you keep your focus on Jesus when life is at its most demanding?
2. What new prayer rhythms could you build into your life?
3. Have you ever used a template in prayer? Was it helpful?
4. How do you stop a prayer rhythm becoming an empty, meaningless duty?
5. What prayer rhythms are going on in your church at the moment?



Life and Time

Give each person a piece of paper and ask them to draw a circle covering most of the page. Then invite them to write the various things they do in a week around the edge, and to divide up the circle to show roughly what proportion of their lives they spend on each thing (work, sleep, socialising, church, doing hobbies etc). Then invite them to discuss how they feel about the way they use their time at the moment, and what they'd like to change.

Celebrate through the busyness: We often complain about having too much to do in life, and we forget what a privilege it is to have work, family, hobbies and responsibilities. Invite people to speak out prayers of thanksgiving for the many different things which fill up their lives.



Reflections on Rhythm

1. Who sets the Pace?

Take time to think about who sets the pace of your life and who governs your agenda. Is it God? Is it other people? Is it circumstances?

If you've tried a prayer rhythm but it hasn't lasted, what got in the way of it? Think about what would need to stop, start or change in your life, in order for you to build a consistent prayer rhythm.

What or who would you need to say 'no' to?

What or who would you need to say 'yes' to?

2. Where are the Spaces?

Write a timetable of your average day, then look through it and think about where there might be spaces for prayer.

Given your personality and your commitments in life, where would be the best place to put prayer in your day?

Could you use signposts to prompt you to pray for certain things – such as praying for the local emergency services every time you hear a siren?

Think about setting up a 'monastic bell' – an alarm to prompt you to pray at a certain time during the day.



Group Prayer Activities:

- *Say the Lord's Prayer one line at a time, leaving plenty of space in between the lines. Invite people to use each line as a springboard, inspiring prayers for their families, their church or their local community. Invite them to speak those prayers out loud if they feel comfortable doing so.*
- *Use Aaron's Blessing (Numbers 6:24-26) as a basis for prayer, praying it as a blessing over different groups in your local community.*

Prayer:

Gracious God of abundance,
You have filled our lives to overflowing with your riches,
So that we can enjoy you without ration, and receive from you without limit.
We welcome your nourishing, sustaining presence in our lives.
We choose to put our roots down deep in the soil of your word,
We choose to draw on the life-giving water of your Spirit every day,
We choose to soak our souls in you, so that your fragrance will spill
out of our lives into the world around us.

Amen.

(Taken from a responsive prayer written by Lyndall Bywater, based on Isaiah 61)



Session 4

Obstacles to Prayer (1)

The Bible teaches us that we live in a world which hasn't quite worked out the way God first intended it to. The very beginning of the book of Genesis paints us a picture of a beautiful world, completely at peace, moving in perfect harmony with itself and its creator. Yet somewhere along the line we lost our way. The world we see now, though still beautiful, is shadowed with pain and worn out by greed and exploitation.

But what does all of that have to do with our prayer lives? Surely prayer is the one place we can go to hide from the depressing realities of this broken world. Yet, the sin-sickness we see on our TV screens has impacted each and every one of us. We're born into it; we grow up in it; and even when we invite Jesus to set us free from it, it still takes time for his holiness and healing to soak into our souls.

Prayer is a place of encounter: we encounter God, but we also encounter ourselves. If you wanted to escape yourself, then you should avoid prayer at all costs! Prayer takes us deep into the love and truth of God, and in that place we start to see just how deeply the fallenness and brokenness of our world have impacted our own lives.

'Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed.'
(Isaiah 53:4-5, *NLT*)

This session explores how the sin and suffering in our lives can put obstacles in the way of our prayer lives, but we're also going to discover that healing and forgiveness can open the way to new depths in prayer.

Session 4

Outline



Welcome and Worship	25 Mins
Presenter's Introduction	9 Mins
Story: Simon Price	1.5 Mins
Talk Part 1: Fallenness and brokenness	5 Mins
Story: Major Judith Payne	1 Min
Talk Part 2: Fallenness – sin and forgiveness	5.5 Mins
Story: Major Judith Payne	2.5 Mins
Talk Part 3: Fallenness – apathy and distraction	5 Mins
Pause Point: Discussion question 1	10 Mins
Stories: Major Judith Payne and Simon Price	1.5 Mins
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Talk Part 4: Brokenness – wounds and healing	5.5 Mins
Story: Major Judith Payne	2.5 Mins
Talk Part 5: Brokenness – wrong beliefs	5 Mins
Pause Point: Discussion question 2	10 mins
Story: Simon Price	1.5 Mins
Talk Part 6: It's God's work	2.5 Mins
Story: Major Judith Payne	4.5 Mins
Talk Part 7: Friendship and fun	4.5 Mins
Presenter's Conclusion	2 Mins
Prayer and Close	10 Mins

Session 4

Activities, Discussions and Reflections

Scriptures in the Teaching

Hebrews 4:16; Hebrews 11:1; Colossians 3:1; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Proverbs 3:5; John 6:36; John 8:32; 1 Timothy 2:7; James 5:16



Discussion Questions

1. What has helped you to overcome apathy and distraction in your prayer life?
2. Have you ever seen wrong beliefs affect the way people pray?
3. Is there an experience which has made your prayer life stronger or deeper?
4. What kind of God do you envisage when you start to pray? What kind of attitude do you feel he has towards you? Is he welcoming or stern, grumpy or gracious?
5. What obstacle would you say most blocks your prayer life? What could you do to remove it or work around it?



Personal Response Activities

(NB. If you have time, we recommend using one of these at the end of Judith's story, just before part 7 of the talk. Alternatively you could use one during the Prayer and Close section at the end of the session.)

1. Lights in the Darkness

Lay tea-lights out in a cross shape on the floor or on a table. Play some gentle music and invite people to come forward to light a candle, symbolising their prayer that God's Spirit would shine light and hope into the dark places in their lives.

2. Letting Go

Give each person a stone to hold. After a few minutes' silence, pass a bowl or bucket of water around and invite each person to drop their stone into the water, as a sign of their willingness to let go of anything which is stopping them from

moving forward in their relationship with God. (It is important to remind people that the act of dropping the stone is symbolic; it won't solve the problem, but it is a prayer to God to express their intent to move forward.)

3. Holding Hands

Give each person a cut-out of two hands, joined at the thumb (fold a piece of paper in half and cut out a hand shape, with the outer-most edge of the thumb along the fold). Invite people to open the hands out and to write on the palms, noting obstacles they'd like to see removed from their prayer lives, or ways they'd like to go deeper with God. Then invite them to fold the hands together again (so their writing can't be seen), and to invite two other people in the group to write, one on the outside of each hand, a word of encouragement or a promise to support them in prayer. (There is no need to tell either of those people what is written inside the hands.)

4. Get Practical

The nature of the teaching in this session means that it is possible for people to feel stirred and inspired, but not to know what to do next. We would recommend taking some time to talk about practical steps forward. This could be done in the group, but for certain people it may be better to have the conversation one-to-one. The following questions may help:

- a) What one practical thing can I do this week to address the obstacles in my prayer life?
- b) Who can I talk to about the issues this session has stirred up for me (a friend, a church leader, my GP etc)?
- c) What can I do in the longer term to get help with issues of emotional healing (prayer ministry, counselling, other courses etc)?

NB. All one-to-one conversations must be conducted within appropriate safeguarding boundaries.

Blessing:

'But now, GOD's Message, the God who made you in the first place, Jacob, the One who got you started, Israel: "Don't be afraid, I've redeemed you. I've called your name. You're mine. When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you. When you're in rough waters, you will not go down. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end. Because I am GOD, your personal God, The Holy of Israel, your Saviour. I paid a huge price for you: all of Egypt, with rich Cush and Seba thrown in! That's how much you mean to me! That's how much I love you! I'd sell off the whole world to get you back, trade the creation just for you. So don't be afraid: I'm with you.'" (Isaiah 43:1-5, *The Message*)



Session 5

Obstacles to Prayer (2)

There are days when it can feel like the whole world is against us, and we get those days in our prayer lives too... days when talking to God feels less like soaring on eagle's wings and more like walking through treacle.

It may come as a relief to know that followers of Jesus have been feeling that way for centuries. The writers of the New Testament had all received Jesus' teaching (whether first- or second-hand) and had heard him talk a lot about Satan. They had no doubt that the enemy of their souls had been utterly defeated by Jesus' death and resurrection, but they knew that he would continue to try and obstruct the building of God's Kingdom. Jesus had taught them that prayer would release a power which would undo the works of Satan, so his followers understood perfectly well that prayer would be opposed at all costs.

When our prayer lives feel blocked, it might be because we're getting a taste of that oppressive evil which has been trying to thwart the work of God since the dawn of creation.

'The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray.'
(Samuel Chadwick)

In this session we explore some of the ways in which the enemy might try to put obstacles in the way of our prayer lives, but we will also discover that we can overcome his strategies and find victory in the battle.

Session 5

Outline

Welcome and Worship	25 Mins
Presenter's Introduction	3 Mins
Talk Part 1: Know your enemy	4.5 Mins
Story: Simon Price	1.5 Mins
Talk Part 2: Strategy 1 Stealing	6 Mins
Story: Major Judith Payne	2.5 Mins
Talk Part 3: Strategy 2 Accusation	6.5 Mins
Pause Point: Discussion question 1	10 Mins
Story: Simon Price	2 Mins
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Talk Part 4: Strategy 3 Lies, mockery, division	5 Mins
Story: Major Judith Payne	3.5 Mins
Talk Part 5: Strategy 4 Temptation	6.5 Mins
Pause Point: Discussion question 2	10 Mins
Talk Part 6: Prayer and restoration	5.5 Mins
Story: Major Judith Payne	4 Mins
Presenter's Conclusion	2 Mins
Prayer and Close	15 Mins

Session 5

Activities, Discussions and Reflections

Scriptures in the Teaching

John 10:10; Isaiah 41:10-14; Revelation 12:10; Isaiah 54:17; John 8:43-44; Jude 1:17-18; Romans 16:17-20; Matthew 4:1-11; Philippians 4:7



Discussion Questions

1. How have you seen the enemy's strategies of stealing and accusation affect your own life or the lives of others?
2. How have you seen the enemy's strategies of lying, mockery, division or temptation affect your own life or the lives of others?
3. What names does the Bible give Satan? What do these names tell us about how our prayer lives might be affected by the enemy's work?
4. Have you ever felt actively opposed in building your prayer life? If so, how?
5. What can we do to help each other overcome the obstacles to prayer in our lives?



Armour Activity

Make pieces of armour out of cardboard (or acquire a child's set). It should include all the items mentioned in Ephesians 6:14-17: belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet and sword. Make sure there's at least one item for each member of the group (provide more than one of each item if necessary).

NB. The armour can be of any size, and if you have a particularly creative group, you could give them the opportunity to make/decorate their own piece of armour.

- a) At the start of the meeting, read Ephesians 6:10-18, then invite people to pick up a piece of armour and think about it: what it does, why it's important and how you wear it. This could end in a discussion or a time of personal prayer.
- b) At the end of the meeting, invite people to get into pairs to pray for each other. Invite each person to ask God to point them

to one item of armour which is particularly relevant for the person they're praying with. Invite them to give that piece of armour to their partner to hold while they pray for them.



Armour Activity

Give each member of the group a take-away weapon: a card containing a Bible verse which affirms a truth about who they are in Christ. (If you're feeling particularly creative, you could make the cards into sword-shapes.) Invite them to keep it with them in the coming week, and to read it several times a day (out loud if possible). If you continue to meet as a group, you could swap cards every week until everyone has spent a week with each card.

St Patrick's Breastplate:

I arise today, through God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me,
God's shield to protect me, God's host to save me:
From snares of devils, From temptation of vices,
From everyone who shall wish me ill, afar and near.
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.
Christ to shield me today.
Amen.



Session 6

Unanswered Prayer?

One of the most enjoyable things in life is a good conversation; but a conversation full of disagreement is a different matter. It's a lot less enjoyable when there's no common ground, and you don't see eye to eye with the other person. That said, it's often those difficult conversations which help sharpen our thinking.

Difficult conversations might be hard work, but they're nowhere near as frustrating and disappointing as being ignored – when you ask a question but the hoped-for reply doesn't come, and you sense that your voice isn't being heard.

Many of the writers of the psalms describe that feeling of being ignored, sometimes by their friends and loved ones, but often by God himself. Their poetry is bleak and even brutal, as they cry out to God to answer them:

'How long, O Lord, how long?'

They're frustrated; they're disappointed; perhaps they're even feeling humiliated by God's apparent indifference to their heartfelt prayers. That cry of 'God, when are you going to answer me?' has probably been uttered by almost every Christian down the centuries.

Sometimes it doesn't really matter if we don't get the answer we want, because we're asking for something relatively small, but prayer isn't just for the small things; prayer is for the big things in our lives... the things that matter deeply to us.

The Bible makes it clear that God wants us to ask for things; he wants us to trust him with the things which matter most to us in life. So how do we cope when we've poured out our biggest requests and he doesn't seem to be responding?

This session offers no simple answers, but does contain some honest thoughts and some challenging questions.

Session 6

Outline

Welcome and Worship	20 Mins
Presenter's Introduction	5.5 Mins
Story: Major Alan Norton	0.5 Mins
Talk Part 1: Honesty and disappointment	2.5 Mins
Pause Point: Discussion question 1	10 Mins
Story: Major Alan Norton	1.5 Mins
Talk Part 2: Questions in Mark's Gospel	6.5 Mins
Story: Major Alan Norton	1.5 Mins
Talk Part 3: What are we asking for?	8.5 Mins
Story: Major Alan Norton	3.5 Mins
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Talk Part 4: Why are we asking? (1)	2.5 Mins
Pause Point: Discussion question 2	10 Mins
Talk Part 5: Why are we asking? (2)	4 Mins
Story: Major Alan Norton	0.5 Mins
Talk Part 6: Who are we asking?	9.5 Mins
Story: Major Alan Norton	1 Min
Pause Point: Discussion question 3	10 Mins
Presenter's Conclusion	2 Mins
Prayer and Close	20 Mins

Session 6

Activities, Discussions and Reflections

Scriptures in the Teaching

Psalm 130:1-2; Jeremiah 20:7; Exodus 5:22-23; Job 30:20-21; Psalm 94:3;
Mark 1:40 3:31 4:35 5:21 8:11 9:5 10:35 14:32 15:4 15:25; 1 Kings 3:4-14

(All quotations shown on screen during this episode are taken from the *English Standard Version*)



Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever prayed about something and felt disappointment or negative emotions towards God?
2. Do we sometimes pray for things out of wrong motivations?
3. Tell some of your own stories of answered and unanswered prayer.
4. In what ways can unanswered prayer be unhelpful to our relationship with God, and in what ways might it help our relationship with God?
5. What is the most helpful thing we can do for someone who's disappointed with God or struggling because of unanswered prayer?



Talking Metaphors

Invite members of the group to talk about how it feels when they're praying for big/important things. The Bible uses all kinds of metaphors for prayer; you could explore some/all of these, and then think up some new ones to describe how prayer feels for you at the moment.

Prayer metaphors: knocking at a door (Luke 11:5-9), petitioning a judge (Luke 18:1-8), beating your chest (Luke 18:9-14), wearing sackcloth (Psalm 35:13), weeping (Psalm 39:12), crying out (Psalm 143:1), talking into a dark cloud (Lamentations 3:44), giving birth (Galatians 4:19), wrestling (Colossians 4:12), burning incense (Psalm 141:2, Revelation 5:8).



Persevering Prayer

When we've become tired and discouraged from praying for something for a long time without seeing breakthrough, one of the most encouraging things can be to ask others to join us in prayer for that situation, so we're not alone on the journey. Invite members of the group to share situations where they've been praying for a long time without seeing the answer they hope for. Then pray together as a group for those situations.



What, Why, Who?

Give a time of silence (or play some quiet background music) and ask people to apply the three questions in today's teaching to a situation they're praying for at the moment:

- 1. What am I asking for?*
- 2. Why am I asking God for this?*
- 3. Who is the God I'm asking? What is he like and how does he see me and my request?*



Questions and Promises

Give each person a piece of string or wool (approx 50 cm long). Invite them to think about the unanswered questions they want to bring to God in prayer – those areas of confusion and disappointment which still trouble them. As they think and pray, invite them to knot and tangle the string as much as possible. Have some cards available in the centre of the room, each with a Scripture promise on it. When they're ready, invite each person to swap their tangled rope for a promise card, as a sign that they want to leave their tangle of unanswered questions in God's hands, and trust him to fulfil his promises.

Session 6 Activities, Discussions and Reflections continued on page 28

Session 6

Activities, Discussions and Reflections Continued

Prayer:

Mighty God of eternal hope,

You have commissioned us to join you in your great work of restoration,
To walk through the ruins, bringing peace and new life.

We willingly embrace the mission which your conquering Son has entrusted to us.

We offer you our own ruined places, to be rebuilt to your design;

We offer you our time and talents, to be invested for your Kingdom;

We offer you our plans, to be woven into your redemption story;

And, as so many have done before us, we offer you ourselves, body, soul, mind and spirit, that we may take our place in the glorious adventure of infusing your creation with self-denying holiness and death-defying hope.

And all this we declare in the matchless name of Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords, AMEN!

(Taken from a responsive prayer written by Lyndall Bywater, based on Isaiah 61)

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Coming soon ...

one thing
for the
Church

Look out for the second part of the 'One Thing' series, due for release in summer 2016, featuring six sessions on how to grow prayer in the local church.



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