

Introduction: *How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People*

By Pete Greig

Thank you to Renovaré for bringing us together in this way to explore the wonderful conundrum of prayer.

Over the next seven weeks we're going to sample quite extensively from a taster menu, trying every variety of prayer from intercession to contemplation, adoration to spiritual warfare. Some flavours will probably be familiar to your palate, but others may well seem quite strange. (In a way that's the whole point.) My prayer is that, over the next couple of months, your hunger for the Lord will be heightened, your awareness of his voice attuned, your expectancy sharpened, and your experience of his presence enriched as we sample different aspects of communication and communion with Him.

I only really started seriously exploring prayer because I was so very bad at it. As a busy young pastor more than twenty years ago my days were over-full. I was enthusiastically launching programs, frenetically running events, preparing talks and attending endless meetings. But somewhere within all this activity a cavity opened up in my soul. A sort of loneliness. A longing to know and be known by the One I was seeking to serve. There was little time in my day and little space in my heart for quiet reflection. I hadn't yet discovered the riches of Richard Foster, Henri Nouwen, or Eugene Peterson. I'm embarrassed to admit that my personal prayer-life was mostly outsourced to Godly old ladies. Meanwhile our church prayer meeting was poorly attended.

We launched a 24-7 Prayer Room to learn how to pray and, as we started spending time in that holy space night-and-day, the Holy Spirit did indeed begin to teach us. Surprisingly our prayer room began to multiply. Unexpectedly it began to self-seed around the world as others heard about our prayer vigil and decided to join in. Before we knew it a movement had begun which hasn't stopped spreading ever since. We are now in more than half the nations on earth and, by the grace of God, we've been praying non-stop for more than two decades.

I still don't find prayer particularly easy but I have certainly learned a few things in the intervening years, not least through my many mistakes and a fair share of pain. *How to Pray* gathers much of this hard-won learning and presents it in a way that is, I hope, accessible and engaging, as 'a simple guide for normal people'. I have also created a free, online Prayer Course with videos and discussion-starters to accompany each chapter. You can find this resource at www.prayercourse.org

In the Reading Schedule below, I've omitted Nicky Gumbel's foreword because I thought you might want to cut to the chase, but it might be worth a read as we prepare to embark upon this journey. Nicky is the pioneer of the Alpha course through which millions of people have been awakened to faith in Jesus and he also writes a daily commentary to accompany the *Bible in One Year* which is YouVersion's most popular daily devotional. When I asked Nicky to write the foreword he said 'Oh, I'm so glad you're going to call it 'How to Pray!' Then he explained to me that the particular day of *The Bible in One Year* entitled *How to Pray* is invariably the one that is by far the most downloaded every year. This, it seems, really is the question people around the world

are asking more than any other: *How do I talk to God? How do I hear his voice? How can I experience more miracles?*

It's the question new Christians inevitably ask: *'If Christianity really is a relationship with God, how do I actually set about having a living conversation with him?'* It's also the question asked by many old-timers who've been around the block a few times. (I've lost count of the number of leaders who've confessed to me over the years that they really struggle with prayer.) Ultimately this is the question asked by Jesus' first disciples: *'Lord, teach us to pray.'* (Luke 11:1) They didn't ask him how to plant churches, how to preach better sermons, or how to pastor the flock. They asked how to pray because they realised that it was the secret sauce of his Kingdom! Their rabbi's prayer-life was clearly the bedrock of his entire ministry. And of course, Jesus responded wholeheartedly to their humble request with *The Lord's Prayer*. What other prayer could I use, therefore, to provide shape and structure for the book we are about to explore together?

Anselm of Canterbury, the great 12th century scholar and saint, made a tantalising suggestion about prayer in his classic work *Cur Deus Homo*. He posits that prayer arises from our yearning to reach that state of being for which we were created. It is, in other words, a kind of homesickness and a gentle flourishing. Far from being a rarefied religious duty, prayer is an intrinsically human compulsion, less about deficiency than desire. And so, in the words of Richard Foster's classic title and with the help of the Holy Spirit, may these coming weeks of shared study lead each one of us forward, 'finding the heart's true home'.

Six Week Reading Schedule		
WEEK 1	How to P.R.A.Y. Introduction Chapter 1 Chapter 2	<i>Lord, teach us to pray. (Lk. 11.1)</i> How to Make the Most of this Book Prayer Everywhere Keeping it Simple
WEEK 2	Pause & Rejoice Chapter 3 Chapter 4	<i>Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name.</i> Slowing and Centring Adoration
WEEK 3	Asking (pt.1) Chapter 5 Chapter 6	<i>Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.</i> Petition Intercession
WEEK 4	Asking (pt.2) & Yielding (pt.1) Chapter 7 Chapter 8	<i>'Give us today our daily bread.'</i> Unanswered Prayer Contemplation
WEEK 5	Yielding (pt.2) Chapter 9 Chapter 10	<i>Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.</i> Listening Confession & Reconciliation
WEEK 6	Yielding (pt.3) Chapter 11 Chapter 12	<i>'Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.'</i> Spiritual Warfare Amen