

SESSION 4

PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER: DEALING WITH DISAPPOINTMENTS

KEY VERSE:

“ABBA, FATHER,” HE SAID, “EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE FOR YOU. TAKE THIS CUP FROM ME. YET NOT WHAT I WILL, BUT WHAT YOU WILL” (MARK 14:36)

REMEMBER:

- Computer with speakers
- Paper, pens and a receptacle
- Copies of the case studies

(5 MINS) WELCOME

AIM: TO MAKE EVERYONE FEEL WELCOME

- Recap last week: Intercession
- Did anyone manage to try prayer walking or praying through the headlines or attending a prayer meeting?
- **This week:** a subject that affects us all – Unanswered prayer
 - » **Handle with Care:** Be aware of any group members who are going through hard times and may find this session difficult. You could also ask them in advance whether they would like to receive prayer from the whole group.
- Open with prayer

(15 MINS) VIDEO

AIM: TO INTRODUCE THE THEME AND PROVOKE DISCUSSION

- Pete uses the example of a father teaching his son to ride a bike to explain that God's silence is not the same as his absence
- When we suffer we become vulnerable to three particular temptations:
 - » Doubting God's love for us ('Abba Father ...')
 - » Doubting God's power to answer us ('everything is possible for you')
 - » Pretending that we're okay when we're not ('take this cup from me')
- It is only when faith is difficult that we have the opportunity to become faithful – literally full of faith

(20 MINS) DISCUSS

AIM: TO GET EVERYONE SPEAKING ABOUT THE THEME

- What did you find most helpful in the video?
- What questions did it raise for you
- Ask everyone to think of an unanswered prayer that they have had in the past. It could be a small thing, like rain on a wedding day, or a massive thing like an on-going illness. Encourage honesty
- Pete attributes unanswered prayer to three potential causes: God's world (the laws of nature and logic), God's will (he knows best) and God's war (spiritual resistance to the will of God). With the benefit of hindsight, would you now attribute your unanswered prayer to God's world, God's will or God's war?

(15 MINS) DO IT

AIM: TO PUT OUR LEARNING INTO PRACTICE BY PRAYING

- **Pray in Twos and Threes:** Especially about areas of personal disappointment or on-going need. It may be helpful to split men and women to encourage greater honesty
- **Pray Together:** If there is time, bring the group back together and ask them to sit comfortably with open hands, imagining that they are holding their particular need out to God
- **Pray Christ's prayer in Gethsemane slowly, inviting people to adopt a different posture for each line as follows:**
 - » 'Abba Father ...' (place hand on heart and remember God is with you in this and he cares)
 - » 'Everything is possible for you' (clench fists and invite people to take a moment to thank God for his power and the unquenchable hope we have in prayer)

- » ‘Take this cup from me’ (open hands again to God, and invite people very simply, childishly to ask God to take the problem away/or sort it out)
- » ‘Yet not my will but yours.’ (Lift hands to shoulder height in a position of surrender and give people time to express costly trust and faithfulness towards God)

(5 MINS)

AIM: TO PERSEVERE AND SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER PRAYERFULLY IN THE COMING WEEK

- If this session has provoked deep emotions or big questions for any members of the group, encourage them to talk and pray further with a trusted friend in the week ahead
- **Lucky Dip Prayers:**
 - » **Explain:** that sometimes it is easier to have faith for someone else than it is to pray about your own problems. That’s why it can be good to share prayer requests with Christian friends, especially if it’s a long-term issue requiring perseverance
 - » **Ask:** everyone to write their name and a specific prayer request on a piece of paper. Place these in a convenient receptacle and ask everyone to take a prayer request and pray for that person daily in the week ahead

GOING DEEPER: OPTIONAL EXTRA MATERIAL

(20 MINS) DEEPEN IT

AIM: TO APPLY THE TEACHING TO REAL-LIFE SITUATIONS

- Give out copies of the two case studies. Ask each group to read the story and formulate a response
- Take feedback

EXTRA RESOURCES

USEFUL QUOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

- ‘When we pray, God sometimes does a miracle and airlifts us out of our problems, but more often he parachutes in to join us in the midst of them.’ – Pete Greig
- **Thank God you’re not God:** ‘“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord’ (Isaiah 55: 8)
- ‘The Bible is more honest about unanswered prayer than most churches. Jesus experienced at least three unanswered prayers. And more than half the Psalms are not happy, clappy – they are laments’ – Pete Greig

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Read: Pete Greig, *God on Mute*

CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY A: CRY BABY

A newborn baby screamed and cried night after night until her parents thought they would go crazy. They prayed desperately that she would stop crying just long enough to let them get some sleep, but their prayers made no notable difference. If anything, praying seemed to make the crying worse and eventually they made a decision to stop asking God for help altogether.

Jim and Molly's crying baby is now a happy, well-adjusted young adult and her parents are dedicated members of their local church. Yet in an honest discussion one evening, Jim opened up about the long-term impact of that simple unanswered prayer on his relationship with God. He admitted that he no longer expects God to answer his most personal prayer requests. So for twenty years he has only prayed for others, almost never for himself. He and Molly still expect the Father to do miracles for other people, just not for them. As Jim finished speaking there was an awkward silence in the room. How would you respond?¹

CASE STUDY B: THE HEALING OF A HEADACHE

At your house group meeting you have a bad headache and because no one has an aspirin someone rather self-consciously offers to pray. The group gathers round and joins in, and you feel a little awkward. You also notice that one of the newer people, Sarah, is hanging back. At the end of the evening someone asks how your head is and you realise you're feeling fine. 'Wow, I guess I was healed!' you say and everyone starts grinning and saying things like 'Cool' and 'Praise the Lord'.

Sarah, the new girl, rushes out of the room and you find her in the kitchen in tears. It turns out that when she was twelve her five-year-old brother had died of leukaemia. She describes desperate childhood prayers and chemotherapy and how her mother was never around because she seemed to be at the hospital. Every night Sarah had knelt by her bed and prayed with every fibre of her being for the life of her brother, but he had died leaving a gaping chasm of loss inside. 'Why?' she asks, 'would God heal your headache and let my brother die? It all seems so arbitrary.' Sarah needs love but she also needs real, intelligent answers. What might you say to her?

¹ Pete Greig, *God on Mute: Engaging the Silence of Unanswered Prayer* (Kingsway Publications, 2007) p. 21.