



Introduction to the course

Welcome to the **Prayer Eleven for Seekers** course. In 2008, when I created my first course in prayer (**Prayer Eleven for Explorers**), it was intended as a course that adults who had been Christians for some time could do in a class setting. It included lots of class exercises as well as various forms of homework for the students to do. Gradually I came to realise that there was a need for a different kind of course. One that was aimed at individual Christians, both new and old, who do not consider their prayer lives to be their strong point! So the course needed to be one that individuals could download and do on their own, or if they wished as part of a small group. This introduction is intended to explain the layout of the course notes for the **Seekers** course.

As you will see, the course notes are divided into five sections (except for the first and last lesson which only have four sections). The first section entitled **Reflection/Discussion** is for individuals or groups to use for reflecting on how the previous lesson's exercises have gone. The second section entitled **Teaching** provides some thoughts and explanation about the aspect of prayer we are looking at in that lesson. The third section entitled **Exercise** is the practical side of the course that the student does on their own each day for however long they want to (I would suggest a week for each lesson) for the duration of the course. I am expecting these exercises to take about 10 minutes each day. If you find they take less time than that, it would still be best if you remain in that place of quiet for the full ten minutes, even if it is just as an act of self discipline. To become better pray-ers we will inevitably need to exercise some level of personal discipline. Also, you may find it useful to have a notepad handy to record briefly how your prayers went each day so that you can see how your relationship with God develops.

The next section entitled **Encouragement** will, I hope, be exactly that. I certainly hope it will not be a discouragement! The people who have contributed their stories are ordinary Christians, and would not see themselves as great "prayer warriors"! My aim with this section is to show that prayer really does make a difference in some way or other. That any of us, no matter how lacking in ability or unworthy we may feel ourselves to be, can be considered great men and women in God's eyes through, in part, our willingness to move forward on our own spiritual journey. This is what the Desert Fathers did back in the first few centuries of the Christian church. They left everything to spend time alone with God in prayer and discovered a power and a wisdom that can only come from God. This was a vocation for the few, but whilst we may not copy them in every way, I hope we can learn something from them. The quotes in my **Sayings of the Desert Fathers** section come from the book of the same title published by Cistercian Publications.

The **Prayer Eleven for Seekers** course is based around **Matthew 6: 5-15, Luke 11: 1-15** and **Luke 18: 1-8** using the *Today's New International Version* (TNIV) of the Bible (see passages below), although other portions of Scripture will be drawn on in different lessons. Each lesson begins with the title phrase "When you meet with God..." and this is because one of the meanings of the Hebrew word for intercession, 'paga', is 'to meet'. So when we pray, this is exactly what we are

doing, we are meeting with God. That is something which should not be taken lightly. When the people of Israel had an opportunity to meet with God they turned it down out of fear, and instead asked Moses to talk to God on their behalf (Exodus 20: 18-21). But when Jesus died on the cross the curtain in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27: 51). This curtain divided the people from the most holy part of the Temple where God was thought to be most present. Symbolically, this rip in the curtain showed that God was now available to meet with all who, in humility, came in search of him. Jesus said in Luke 11: 9, “seek and you will find”, and this prayer course is for those who are seeking to deepen their friendship with God through prayer. If I am introduced to someone, and having learned their name I walk away and have nothing further to do with them, I can hardly say that I know the person. But if I regularly spend time with them, communicate with them, listen to them, etc, I will increasingly know them. So it is with ‘seeking’ God. You do not walk away having found him. Rather, you seek him out every day to find him again and again, and spending time with him so that you may come to know and love him. It is my prayer that as you spend time with God, read the notes of this course, praying the exercises and reflecting on the results, your *faith* will be rewarded; for as it says in Hebrews 11: 6, “*without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*”

Here are the three passages upon which this course is mainly based:

Matthew 6: 5-15 *But when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Luke 11: 1-13 *One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.’”*

Luke 18: 1–8 *“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said; “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’ And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes will he find faith on the earth?’”*