



Unanswered Prayer

How? Why? Where? When?

Session 1:

God on Mute: Engaging the Silence

A note to leaders:

We have provided more content than you need to lead Lifegroup tonight. Please read through the discussion guide entirely before your Lifegroup begins and prayerfully consider the best discussion questions to use with your group. We recommend that you always make time for personal prayer ministry at the end. We are praying for fruitful conversation and meaningful encounters with God!

Icebreaker:

If you had to be in silence (including no media) for 12 hours, what would you do with your time?

Worship:

There's Nothing that Our God Can't Do | *Passion*
Oceans | *Hillsong*
Breakthrough | *Red Rocks Worship*

Introduce the Session:

Key verse: *"Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* – **Matthew 5:3**

Introduction:

Welcome to session 1 of The Prayer Course II: Unanswered Prayer! Over the next five sessions we're going to process some of the painful and disappointing things we've probably all experienced as Christians – which we're not always good at sharing.

During these video sessions and small group discussions, the aim is to share together from personal experience and learn from one another, seeking God and asking how, together, we can learn and grow.

The aim of these sessions isn't to find all of the answers to our questions, but to share and care for one another. The main objective of these sessions is to bind up broken hearts by fostering an atmosphere of honesty and openness together.

Leader's Notes:

If possible, briefly share a part of your own story that has caused you pain or disappointment, setting a tone from the start of honest vulnerability in the group. You might like to start with, "Personally I'm excited about this course because...")

Begin the session by asking someone to open in prayer.

Watch: [The Unanswered Prayer Course - Session 1](#)

Bible passages

Luke 18:9-14, Matthew 5:3-5

Key points:

- It's a sign of faith, not doubt, to wrestle with unanswered prayer
- We need to talk about unanswered prayer for three reasons:

Emotionally – most of us have pain we need to process

Intellectually – we may also have questions we need answered

Culturally – sadly the church can be less honest than the Bible

- 'Grace growth best in winter' (Samuel Rutherford) – Harsh winters are often the seasons in which we mature and become more fruitful

"Faith says, 'Even though I don't understand you right now, God, I love you. I believe your heart for me is good.'" – Bob Sorge

Discussion:

Q. What did you find most helpful, inspiring or challenging in what Pete Greig, Gemma Hunt and Bob Sorge shared?

Q. Pete Greig said that we need to talk about unanswered prayer for three reasons: emotional, intellectual and cultural. Which feels most relevant to you at the present moment as you begin this series?

Q. The words of Jesus in the book of Matthew teach us to expect blessing in the midst of challenges – how does this encourage (or discourage!) you in your faith?

Q. Read James 1:3-4 and Romans 5:3-5 and discuss what these passages teach about Biblical suffering.

Q. If you could ask God one totally honest question about something you find difficult in your life, what would it be?

Leader's note:

This is potentially a deep and difficult moment. You may like to go around in a circle so that everyone is gently encouraged to participate. Do also make it clear that if anyone would prefer not to share, that's fine.

Q. When have you experienced a 'winter season' in your relationship with God? How did it affect your faith?

Q. "Grace grows best in winter." How does this truth relate to suffering?

Q. Bob Sorge seems to be able to love and trust God even though he's lived with incredible disappointment for decades. How is this possible?

Q. What, practically, do you think is needed for persevering in faith and prayer through the 'winter seasons' of life?

Connect and Pray:

Leader's note:

If your group is more than 3 people, we would recommend splitting into smaller groups of 2 or 3 to give everyone an opportunity to share and pray for one another. Explain how much time you will have for prayer, and roughly how much time each person will have for sharing and praying.

Ask one another:

Q. How are you feeling about the things we've discussed today? Are there any areas in which you'd appreciate prayer?

Closing Comments:

Share with the group what you've really appreciated about the session.

Next week's session will explore Maundy Thursday and the most basic heart questions we all ask when we suffer: "How am I going to get through this?"

Resources & Reflection:

Journaling question:

As I begin this journey into unanswered prayer, what do I want to explore, unpack or contemplate?

Book - God on Mute, Pete Greig



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Session 2:

Maundy Thursday: How?

A note to leaders:

We have provided more content than you need to lead Lifegroup tonight. Please read through the discussion guide entirely before your Lifegroup begins and prayerfully consider the best discussion questions to use with your group. We are praying for fruitful conversation and meaningful encounters with God!

Welcome back! In Session 2 of The Unanswered Prayer Course we explore the deep heart questions we tend to ask when confronted with suffering. The aim of discussions this time is, therefore, to help people open up emotionally in a way that builds trust and elicits prayer ministry.

You may want to take a little time before the meeting starts to pray through Isaiah 61:1-7. Apply vs 1-3a to yourself, asking the Spirit to anoint you today to 'bind up broken hearts' (v.1) and to 'comfort all who mourn.' (v.2). Then pray vs. 3b-7 over the members of the group.

Icebreaker:

What's your favorite self-care activity?

Worship:

Blessed Be Your Name | *Matt Redman*

New Wine | *Hillsong*

Catch Me Singing | *Cafe Sessions, Sean Curran*

Introduce the Session:

Key verse: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death..." "Abba, Father... everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." – Mark 14:34, 36

Introduction:

Welcome to session 2 of The Prayer Course II: Unanswered Prayer!

Once again we're going to watch a video, then we're going to discuss the questions it raises and finally we're going to pray together. The course as a whole aims to help us process pain and disappointment by addressing the four big questions we all tend to ask when we suffer.

Today it's the questions of the heart: "How am I going to get through this?" and we're going to look at Jesus on Maundy Thursday in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Begin the session by asking someone to open in prayer.

Watch: [The Unanswered Prayer Course - Session 2](#)

Bible passages

Mark 14:32-37, Psalm 23, Romans 5:3-4

Key points

(for your reference in case people need a little prompting!)

- We can learn 4 keys to coping with despair from Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: **Place, People, Prayer, Purpose**
- Jesus isn't just dying for us; He's suffering with us.
- Find a purpose in the pain when you can, and find a purpose in spite of the pain when you can't.

"I don't want to remain in this place of sorrow and anger... I want to choose life again, and I want to find life again." – Simon Thomas

Discussion:

Q. What did you find most helpful, inspiring or challenging in what Pete Greig, Gemma Hunt and Simon Thomas shared?

Q. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus shares with his friends that "[His] soul is overwhelmed to the point of death." What are the barriers or obstacles you face when sharing honestly or openly with friends? Would anyone be willing to share about a time in which their soul felt 'overwhelmed'?

Q. What happens to your prayer life when you are feeling overwhelmed or upset? What do you notice that you do differently?

Q. Pete Greig says, "God does not leave us to suffer alone." Is this something that you have experienced? Where has God met you in your suffering?

Q. Pete talks about Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl, and the importance of finding some kind of purpose in spite of our pain. Do you think that it's possible for everyone to find a purpose in – or in spite of – their pain?

Q. Jesus prayed in a particular place. How can you apply this when you are in despair?

Q. Jesus sought out a few trusted friends. He refused to isolate. How can you resist the temptation to isolate when you are suffering?

Q. Jesus prayed instead of shutting God out. What does 1 Peter 5:7 say about God's response to us? What about Philippians 4:6-7?

Q. Jesus found purpose in His pain. What hope does Hebrews 4:15-16 give us about God's involvement in our pain? Do you find any guidance about how to face difficulty? How does Hebrews 12:2 encourage us to respond to pain? What does this verse tell us about Jesus' ability to relate to our pain?

Take a minute or two in the silence to reflect on an area of suffering you have experienced, consider ways in which you have been able to find – or might be able to find – some kind of purpose in it or in spite of it.

[When the group reconvenes]

Q. Would anyone be willing to share a purpose they can see in something they have suffered?

Simon in his interview shares about his honest – often angry – prayers to God. What are the things that make it hard to be truly emotionally honest with God?

Q. How might we as a group do more to invest in one another during struggles and trials? Are there practical steps that need to be taken to support one another more?

Connect and Pray:

Leader's note:

If your group is more than 3 people, we would recommend splitting into smaller groups of 2 or 3 to give everyone an opportunity to share and pray for one another. Explain how much time you will have for prayer, and roughly how much time each person will have for sharing and praying.

Ask one another:

Q. How are you feeling about the things we've discussed today? Are there any areas in which you'd appreciate prayer?

Closing Comments:

Share with the group what you've really appreciated about the session.

Next week's session will explore Good Friday and some of the biggest questions we face in pain and suffering: "Why does God permit suffering?" "Why does He sometimes seem so far away?" "Why do my deepest prayers remain unanswered?"

Resources & Reflection:

Journaling question

Where is God inviting me to meet Him in my pain, this week?

Reflect on...

Take time to pause and reflect on The Isenheim Altarpiece, by Matthias Grünewald, which Pete Greig talked about in the session. (available online [HERE](#))

Books

- *Love, Interrupted* by Simon Thomas
- *Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankl
- *God on Mute* by Pete Greig



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Session 3:

Good Friday: Why?

A note to leaders:

We have provided more content than you need to lead Lifegroup tonight. Please read through the discussion guide entirely before your Lifegroup begins and prayerfully consider the best discussion questions to use with your group. We are praying for fruitful conversation and meaningful encounters with God!

Today we wrestle with the biggest theological question of all time: “Why does a loving God allow terrible things to happen?” This may sound theoretical but, of course, it’s deeply personal. Every member of your group will have asked the “why?” question at some time.

Remember that you don’t have to answer every question, and you certainly won’t solve the problem of evil in 90 minutes! Your aim should be to facilitate the kind of honest conversation in which everyone feels heard. Remember that it’s fine to say, “I don’t know.” Try to lead your group into a place of deeper trust.

Icebreaker:

What has made it difficult to remain peaceful this week?

Worship:

○ Come to the Altar | *Elevation Worship*

We Need a Miracle | *Charity Gayle*

Bigger Than I Thought/King of My Heart Medley | *Sean Curran*

Introduce the Session:

Key verse: “And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’)”

Introduction:

Welcome to session 3 of The Prayer Course II: Unanswered Prayer! As usual we're going to do three things: First, we'll watch a video. Then we'll discuss the questions it provokes. Finally, and most importantly, we'll pray together.

Last time we thought about Maundy Thursday and asked the heart question: "How am I going to get through this?" Today we're going to think about Good Friday and ask the more intellectual question: "Why am I suffering? Why am I going through this? Why is God letting this happen to me?"

Begin the session by asking someone to open in prayer.

Watch: [The Unanswered Prayer Course - Session 3](#)

Bible passages

Mark 15:33-34, John 14:12, Genesis 17:17-22, Ephesians 6:10-17

Key points

(for your reference in case people need a little prompting!)

- Our unanswered prayers can be attributed to **God's world**, **God's will** or **God's war**.
- The will of God is often far darker and more painful than we imagine for reasons we can't immediately understand.
- Spiritual warfare is real. Sometimes we need to stop fighting against God and start fighting with him against the enemy of our souls.

"There is hope, but that hope will not invalidate your pain..." – Alain Emerson

Discussion:

Q. What did you find most helpful, inspiring or challenging in what Pete Greig, Gemma Hunt and Alain Emerson shared?

Q. If you could ask God one "Why?" question, what would it be?

Q. On the cross Jesus asks God, "Why have you forsaken me?" Would anyone be willing to describe a time that you felt abandoned or deserted by God when you needed Him most?

Leader's note:

Please note that this is a challenging question, especially for those who have experienced pain and loss, so be aware of specific circumstances your group members might have faced as you ask this question.

God's will: In the book of Isaiah, God says: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." (Isaiah 55:8)

Q. Looking back on past disappointments, does anyone have an example of a time when God knew best, even though you didn't think so at the time?

Q. Why do we find it so hard to trust God?

Q. How do I align my desires with God's desires and purposes?

Q. Is it difficult to trust God when you are in agony? Why or Why not?

God's world:

Q. How do you believe for miracles and accept not receiving one?

Q. How do you deal with others receiving miracles that you have been asking for and have yet to receive?

God's war:

Q. Is it possible for a tragedy not to be God's 'fault'? Do you agree with Pete Greig's statement that we tend to blame God for things that are Satan's doing?

Q. Does anyone have an experience of spiritual warfare that they can share?

Alain Emerson shares about the power of hope alongside the reality of pain.

Q. Do we as a community lean too hard on one side of this equation, either focusing so much on hope that we aren't honest about pain, or focusing so much on pain that we fail to have hope? How can we hold both hope and pain together?

Q. Pete says, "we are actually fighting with God against Satan." How is suffering connected to spiritual warfare? What do you learn about Satan from I Peter 5:8? What does Ephesians 6:12 tell us about our struggles?

Connect and Pray:

Leader's note:

If your group is more than 3 people, we would recommend splitting into smaller groups of 2 or 3 to give everyone an opportunity to share and pray for one another. Explain how much time you will have for prayer, and roughly how much time each person will have for sharing and praying.

Ask one another:

Q. Earlier we shared the "why?" questions we'd like to ask God. Returning to this exercise, what would your most personal "why?" question be?

Pete Greig says that “it’s possible to trust even when we don’t understand”. Pray for one another. As you do so, you may find it helpful to remember God’s words to the apostle Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor 12:9)

Closing Comments:

Share with the group what you’ve really appreciated about the session.

Next week’s session will explore Holy Saturday and the mystery of God’s silence. We’ll be asking the question “Where?” – “Where on earth are you, God, when heaven is silent, and your son lies dead in the grave?”

Resources & Reflection:

Journaling question

“Where can I see God’s goodness at work in and through painful situations in my life? In what particular ways can I get better at trusting God when I don’t understand him?”

Reflect on...

- Take time to pause and reflect on Christ of Saint John of the Cross, by Salvador Dali (available [here](#)).
- Watch *The Mission*, directed by Roland Joffé (1986).

Books

- *Luminous Dark*, Alain Emerson
- *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis
- *Night*, Elie Wiesel
- *The Crucified God*, Jurgen Moltmann
- *God on Mute*, Pete Greig



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Session 4:

Holy Saturday: Where?

A note to leaders:

We have provided more content than you need to lead Lifegroup tonight. Please read through the discussion guide entirely before your Lifegroup begins and prayerfully consider the best discussion questions to use with your group. We are praying for fruitful conversation and meaningful encounters with God!

Few experiences in life are as disconcerting as seasons in which God is silent. This may be a current reality for some members of your group. Therefore, it's important to dignify their questions in this session without trying to 'solve' them.

This could be a challenging and vulnerable session for many members of your group, especially as there are no easy answers or quick fixes to the topics explored. In God on Mute Pete Greig says that "God's silence is not his absence but rather his presence in another form."

People who are experiencing God's silence can still know His presence, so make sure you leave plenty of time for prayer. And remember that one of the main manifestations of God's presence at such times is the loving presence of God's people.

Please note that this session contains a story about torture in a concentration camp.

Icebreaker:

In what circumstance are you currently maintaining hope when you cannot see resolution yet?

Worship:

Trust In You | *Lauren Daigle*

We Praise You | *Bethel Music*

Faithful | *Elevation Worship*

Introduce the Session:

Key verse: “My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.” – Psalm 22:2

Introduction

Welcome to session 4 of The Prayer Course II: Unanswered Prayer! As usual today we’re going to watch a video, then we’re going to discuss the questions it provokes and finally we’re going to pray together.

Today we’re looking at the mystery of Holy Saturday, and asking “Where” question; “Where is God when heaven is silent?” “Where is God in the midst of my unanswered prayer, pain and suffering?” We’ll be exploring the uncertainty that often comes with waiting, and the struggle when it feels like God is silent.

Begin the session by asking someone to open in prayer.

Watch: [The Unanswered Prayer Course - Session 4](#)

Bible passages

Psalm 22

Key points

(for your reference in case people need a little prompting!)

- Most of us live our lives somewhere between the cross and the resurrection
- Have faith in the faith of others, even when you don’t have faith of your own
- The paradox of real life is hurt and hope together; praise in spite of the pain

“... they tried to kill me; I don’t know how I survived. But I always say that the reason I survived is just to be a testimony for others.”- Helen Berhane

Discussion:

Q. What did you find most helpful, inspiring or challenging in what Pete Greig, Gemma Hunt and Helen Berhane shared?

Q. Where are you waiting for a breakthrough, a word from God, or an answer to your prayers? What unanswered questions are you carrying today?

Q. Pete Greig talks about our tendency to “rush the resurrection”; to “leapfrog Holy Saturday”; to tidy up the mess too fast. What is it that makes waiting with unresolved questions such a hard thing to do?

Q. People often say that God’s timing is perfect. Do you agree with this? Why does he sometimes seem so slow?

Q. Pete Greig says that “God’s silence is not his absence but rather his presence in another form.” In what ways have you experienced God’s presence in the midst of silence in the past?

Q. In the midst of your pain and silence, have there been moments where you have been able to say, like Elie Wiesel, “There is God?”

Q. Pete Greig shares about the significance of developing spiritual muscle memory to carry us through the darker and more difficult times of life. What does this mean for you? What ‘holy habits’ have you cultivated – or would you like to cultivate – in your life?

Q. The Bible articulates the reality of life; the pain and hope coming together. Are there any particular Bible passages that have sustained you during times of trial or struggle?

Q. Helen Berhane’s story demonstrates the power of worshipping in the midst of pain and silence. What can we practically do as a group to help one another to fix our eyes on Jesus in the midst of challenges?

Connect and Pray:

Leader’s note:

If your group is more than 3 people, we would recommend splitting into smaller groups of 2 or 3 to give everyone an opportunity to share and pray for one another. Explain how much time you will have for prayer, and roughly how much time each person will have for sharing and praying.

Ask one another:

Q. Pete Greig says that it’s possible to “Have faith in the faith of others, even when you don’t have faith of your own.” Are there any particular ways in which you would like members of the group to ‘have faith’ on your behalf in prayer now?

Q. Are there any other areas in which you’d appreciate prayer?

Closing Comments:

Share with the group what you’ve really appreciated about the session.

Next time, in our final session, we’ll be focusing on the hope of Easter Sunday and our final question: “When?” – “When will my prayers be answered?”

Resources & Reflection:

Journaling question: Who are the trusted friends I can turn to in a season of silence? How might I let them know this week how important they are to me?

Reflect on...

The poem *Kneeling*, by R S Thomas (1)

Books

- *Night*, Elie Wiesel
- *Between the Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday*, Alan E. Lewis



unanswered.prayercourse.org



Unanswered Prayer

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Session 5:

Easter Sunday: When?

A note to leaders:

We have provided more content than you need to lead Lifegroup. Please read through the discussion guide entirely before your Lifegroup begins and prayerfully consider the best discussion questions to use with your group. We are praying for fruitful conversation and meaningful encounters with God!

Welcome to the final part of The Unanswered Prayer Course! Thank you for all the hard work and prayer you've put into running these sessions.

Today's discussion is one of the most important. The previous four have focused on qualities such as honesty and empathy, lament and trust, but today's can be summed up in just one word: hope. On Easter Sunday we find the ultimate answer to all our unanswered prayers in the historical reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, and in the firm hope of His return.

As this is the final session of the course, you might like to point people towards the additional resources listed at the end of these guides, as well as the extensive archive available in the 'toolshed' at www.prayercourse.org

Please note that this session contains a story about sexual violence and rape.

Icebreaker:

Share something that you hoped would happen and it did!

Worship:

Way Maker | Leland

Ancient Gates | Brooke Ligertwood

Always | Chris Tomlin

Introduce the Session:

Key verse: “Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.” – John 20:19-20

Introduction

Welcome to session 5 of The Prayer Course II: Unanswered Prayer! Today we’ve reached the end of our journey, which culminates in the joy of Easter Sunday, the resurrection of Jesus. We’ll be asking one final, hope-filled question, ‘When’ – *When will my prayers be answered?*

Begin the session by asking someone to open in prayer.

Watch: [The Unanswered Prayer Course - Session 5](#)

Bible passages

John 20:19-20, 2 Corinthians 1:3-5

Key points

(for your reference in case people need a little prompting!)

- There can be a beauty in our brokenness
- Our deepest suffering can become our greatest gift to the world.
- Our ultimate hope as Christians is eternal

“Now, we see the harvest. We can reap this harvest because [the missionaries Mark and Gladys Bliss] planted the seeds in Iran with their tears and their sacrifice” – Ladan Nouri

Discussion:

Q. What did you find most helpful, inspiring or challenging in what Pete and Sammy Greig, Gemma Hunt and Ladan Nouri shared?

The Bible says that we ‘do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.’ (1 Thess. 4:13).

Q. Thinking about an area of long-term disappointment in your life, how might an eternal perspective reframe the way you relate to it?

Q. What do you think the new heaven and the new earth will be like? How will it be different? How will it be the same?

Q. In the video Pete and Sammy Greig used a kintsugi bowl to illustrate the beauty that can come out of brokenness. Where can you see beauty coming out of brokenness in your life, or in the life of someone in this group?

Q. The story of Ladan and the missionaries Mark and Gladys Bliss demonstrates that it can sometimes take months, years or even decades for fruit to come out of our suffering. Are there stories in our community's history of how challenges and trials have now produced fruit? Or are there opportunities for us to turn our current challenges into long-term fruit?

Q. Eugene Peterson writes, "Faith develops out of the most difficult aspects of our existence, not the easiest." How do the stories you've heard across this course reflect and inspire you to keep persevering in the midst of challenges?

Q. How can you see your own brokenness as a way God can use to rescue others? (II Corinthians 1:3-5)

Q. Jesus models how to suffer. What do you learn from His response to hearing of John the Baptist's death in Matthew 14:13-14; Lazarus' death in John 14; and the Garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26:36-46?

Connect and Pray:

Leader's note:

If your group is more than 3 people, we would recommend splitting into smaller groups of 2 or 3 to give everyone an opportunity to share and pray for one another. Explain how much time you will have for prayer, and roughly how much time each person will have for sharing and praying.

Ask one another:

Q. How are you feeling about the things we've discussed today? Are there any areas in which you'd appreciate prayer?

Closing Comments:

Share with the group what you've really appreciated about the session.

Congratulations! We've made it through the Unanswered Prayer Course! There are additional resources on the Prayer Course website (www.prayercourse.org) to help you continue your journey through the topics that we've explored together.

If you'd like to go deeper and you haven't already done so, there are 3 things you can do next:

1. Read *God on Mute*.
2. Work through the forty-day devotional at the end of *God on Mute*.
3. Download the Lectio 365 app from 24-7 Prayer to pray and read the Bible each day with Pete Greig and the team.

You can find out more about the 24-7 Prayer movement at 24-7prayer.com and you can access Pete Greig's other books and teaching at petegreig.org.

Closing Prayer:

As we finish this course, we'll pray an ancient apostolic blessing over us from the book of Romans. It speaks about the power of the Holy Spirit as the one who renews us with hope, so you may like to open your hands now to receive afresh:

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." – Romans 15:13

Resources & Reflection:

Journaling question

What has God spoken, revealed, or shared with me through this journey? What does this mean that I need to do now?

Reflect on...

Take time to pause reflect on The Incredulity of Saint Thomas by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (available online at www.caravaggio.org/the-incredulity-of-saint-thomas.jsp)

Books

- *Surprised by Hope*, Tom Wright
- *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou
- *Dirty Glory*, Pete Greig
- *How to Pray*, Pete Greig