

THE ALPHA

PRAYER GUIDE

2011



PRE-RELEASE

**THE ALPHA PRAYER GUIDE
2011**

24-7PRAYER & ALPHA

*'After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken.
And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of
God boldly.'*
(Acts 4:31)

LIVING ON A PRAYER

Welcome to the *Alpha Prayer Guide*. In this simple booklet we describe the practical models of corporate prayer developed at HTB, alongside inspiring testimonies from Alpha Offices and 24-7 Prayer Rooms around the world. We hope it will help you to mobilise people to pray with greater faith and perseverance.

Whenever I read my bible, study church history or talk to believers in parts of the world where the church is at her most vibrant today, they all tell me the same thing: *the key to more power is more prayer*. Nicky Gumbel describes prayer as: ‘the most important activity of our lives.’

At HTB we don’t yet have the levels of dedication and breakthrough witnessed in places like South Korea and Indonesia. But prayer does underpin everything we do; from *The Alpha Course* to the work of The William Wilberforce Trust. We therefore offer you these pages in the hope that they may help Alpha churches around the world to experience more of God’s presence and power in and through prayer.

C’mon!

Pete Greig
24-7Prayer & Alpha

‘The evangelisation of the world depends first upon a revival of prayer.’

(Robert Speers)

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1. A VISION FOR PRAYER

'The New Testament lays a greater stress on prayer than it does on the evangelisation of people. There is a deeper need to pray than there is even for people to be converted, and I don't say that lightly because there is a fierce need for conversion. But conversions won't happen unless we are praying and the Bible says that from beginning to end.'
(Bishop Sandy Millar)

We have a big vision for the re-evangelisation of the nations and the transformation of society. And the GOOD NEWS is that God has promised to give us precisely these blessings; describing them in 2 Chronicles 7:14 as the healing of the land, the hearing of prayers, and the forgiveness of sins. The BAD NEWS is that this promise is conditional upon our humble and fervent prayers.

"When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.'
(2 Chronicles 7:13-14)

The three most important words in this passage may well be the most inconspicuous words too: *When... If... Then.*

When...

Before God promises blessings, He promises problems. His people are not immune from the droughts and plagues which, to an agrarian culture, meant disaster at every level: environmentally, financially and socially.

If...

We are currently experiencing environmental, financial and social crises but sadly so many of God's people are placing their hope in products, personalities and programmes instead of doing the one thing God requires: that we turn to Him in prayer. There is a big 'If' that acts as a hinge, connecting the prediction of problems ('when') with the most incredible promises of healing and salvation ('then'). We want God to say '*If problems come, when you pray, then I will act...*' but actually He says the exact opposite: '*When problems come, if you pray, then I will act...*'

Then...

When challenges come, if God's people will respond with prayers that are humble, hungry and holy, He promises to answer us by sending forgiveness and healing. The hinge of history, it seems, is the bended knee. In the following section you will read five remarkable testimonies about the power of prayer to change lives, communities and even nations today.

'God is not deaf, He listens; more than that, He acts. He does not act in the same way whether we pray or not. Prayer exerts an influence upon God's actions, even upon His existence.' **(Karl Barth)**

2. STORIES OF ANSWERED PRAYER:

How prayer is changing lives all around the world:

- How Prayer Changes Nations (India)
- How Prayer Changes Townships (South Africa)
- How Prayer Changes Alpha (Northern Ireland)
- How Prayer Changes Lives (UK)
- How Prayer Changed a Campus (USA)

2.1 INDIA: How Prayer Changes Nations; an interview with J. Varadaraj

As the Director of Alpha India, J Varadaraj – or simply ‘Raj’ - is known to thousands as a leader and evangelist, but his heart beats with an unusual passion for prayer and in this remarkable interview, Raj shares hard-won insights and precious keys to the kinds of prayer that change nations.

Raj, I’m told that you get up to pray from 2 a.m. most days. What are the keys to sustaining such a remarkable personal prayer life?

Over the years I have cultivated a discipline of regular praying. My attention span is twenty minutes. So I have slotted my prayer time in to twenty minutes each. Usually I spend time to collect myself – a re-gathering of the mind and becoming present to His Presence. And then when ready, I read scripture. I do have regular portions that I read systematically and often there is spontaneous reading too, as led by the Spirit. I have found this imperative to my prayer life. Scripture cleanses the mind of all non-God ideas and fills the heart with faith. I also keep a journal during this time. I have moment of rest and waiting on him in the process.

Do you always pray in the same way?

In the initial years of being a Christian, I used to pray loudly for long periods of a time. Now it is normal to pray loudly when there is a heavy burden, otherwise it is gentle conversation with God, often in silence. Heart to heart. I do have prayer times with others – with a small group on a regular basis, with family daily etc., over the phone with a few friends fairly regularly.

Is prayer something which you have always found easy to do?

Not always. Sometimes it's a struggle. At other times it is easier. Prayer is an out-flow and an overflow of a relationship with God. Being rightly related to God and others helps.

What advice would you give to a new Christian who is struggling to pray or is wondering how to pray?

Keep praying, whether you feel like it or not. Prayer is spiritual discipline, an acquired habit. Till one acquires, it might appear tough.

You were mentored by Henri Nouwen (author 'The Wounded Healer'). What did he teach you about prayer?

Three things: To be myself in the presence of God. To wait without hurry, and to ask with honesty.

Why do we need to pray – can't God just do it anyway?

As our Lord taught us, in Matthew 6, the Father in Heaven knows all our needs before we ask them... So it's a good question: 'Why pray?' One answer is simply that the Father desires to hear His children's voice. He desires to know what is troubling us and how

He can make us happy. How he longs to know that our desires are in tune with his. When he knows that we want to fulfil His calling upon us, He will answer.

How do you see prayer changing lives in India?

Historically, in India, prayer has been the back bone of all revival movements. In the early 20th century, John Hyde (affectionately known as 'Praying Hyde') prayed continuously for a revival and during the same period there were 54,000 baptisms in Punjab area alone. Later on Bakht Sing, a man of prayer, planted hundreds of churches all over the country and the 'Friend's Missionary Prayer Bands' planted several thousand churches. When people seek to pray, their hearts are softened and become more open to the work of the Spirit allowing transformations to take place.

What impact has prayer had on Alpha India and its growth?

Encouraging churches associated with us to prevail in prayer for this work had united us spiritually and they have made it their work. We circulate prayer lists regularly to prayer partners. We have found that this corporate prayer brings a sense of awareness that God is in control of his work, a sense of dependency on the author of the work, a sense of confidence that God is with us (and we are not alone) and openness to new relationships and opportunities. The results we see here are answers to many prayers from multitudes in this country for souls.

As someone passionate about prayer who also heads up Alpha India, how do you see prayer and mission fitting together?

Mission is the fuel that propels the prayer. One cannot pray much without substance, for prayer is substance in relationship with the

Father. It is sharing God's missional heart through our passion for the lost.

What advice would you give to a Church Leader who is trying to encourage his congregation to pray?

The life of a Church Leader is prophetic to the congregation. Prayer life needs to be modelled to the congregation. They need to know when the leader prays. The leader can mentor the congregation to pray by praying with individuals and families. He can show methods of prayer by teaching the congregation. Calling them to pray together periodically, he can mobilise them as a body.

2.2 SOUTH AFRICA: How Prayer Changes Townships

Bishop Peter Sekhonyane (right) was discouraged. In twenty years as a crusade evangelist he'd led thousands of people to the Lord, yet so few had continued in faith and been integrated into the church. Not knowing anything about the Alpha Course model, he was dejectedly preparing to quit preaching and return to his previous job as a concrete engineer. But then God spoke to him: "Peter, you evangelised the people but you didn't teach them to pray. Therefore they are not strong enough when trouble and temptation comes. Go now, and teach my people to pray".

In obedience to this gentle rebuke, Peter erected a 300-seater tent and began training people how to pray in one of the 'extensions' of Orange Farm, a poor township near Cape Town. People flocked to the 24-7 Prayer tent, interceding night and day for their families and the community. What was even more remarkable was that

many of those who came to pray hadn't previously considered themselves Christians.

The idea of 24-7 Prayer quickly caught on and word spread into other areas of the township. Within nine months, Peter had established similar 24-7 prayer tents in seven of the twenty extensions. And then came the next great shock: wherever 24-7 Prayer was established, the crime rates began to come down. In fact the improvement was so dramatic that the police specifically asked Peter to take his prayer tent to a particular village where crime and violence were rampant and they didn't know what to do. After just two weeks of 24-7 Prayer in this new location, crime had declined there too, and before long the police were asking Peter to establish prayer tents in all their worst crime areas.

“Now even the white churches are opening their doors to adopt 24-7 Prayer”, says Bishop Peter with a wry smile. “In fact, the churches that were most involved with apartheid are now the suppliers of the tents we use”.

After five years of 24-7 Prayer in Townships across South Africa, Bishop Peter's team analysed their careful records and calculated the social and spiritual impact of their endeavours. The results are stunning:

- 38 debts cancelled
- 82 misplaced people reconnected
- 190 successful corruption prosecutions
- 2,807 marriages restored
- 7,240 churches have adopted 24-7 Prayer
- 8,400 new businesses established
- 785,300 salvations

Marriages restored... businesses established... hundreds of thousands coming to Christ! So many of our greatest passions are reflected in this list, and the key to it all has been persistent prayer.

'And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?'

(Luke 18:7)

2.3 (Northern Ireland) How Prayer Changes Alpha

Several years ago, we set up a 24-7 Prayer Room for Lent in which we prayed for 24 hours every weekend from 10 a.m. on a Saturday till 10 a.m. on a Sunday, and then for the whole of Holy Week finishing just before our Good Friday Service. The people who set up the prayer room and a large proportion of those who took slots during that time had come to faith in Jesus through Alpha. We calculated that more than 140 people prayed at least once in the 24-7 Prayer Room – the biggest prayer meeting we ever had.

When we called a meeting to review our season of 24-7 Prayer and to decide what we had learnt from the experience, everyone said that we should never have stopped it! So a few weeks later we started praying again from 10am on Saturday to 10am on Sunday and with only a few short breaks we have been praying every weekend ever since, expanding it to 48 hours on the weekend before our Alpha Courses and praying 24-7 all through Holy Week.

What all this has done is to drive the development of the prayer life of the congregation by keeping prayer to the forefront constantly. -

Rev John Dickinson – Carnmoney Presbyterian Church, Northern Ireland

2.4 (UK) How Prayer Changes Lives

A testimony from the first 24-7 Prayer Room in Chichester, England. "Last night someone prayed for me and for the first time in my life I really felt God enter into me and it was an incredible feeling (almost like I was a child again).... and then God actually talked to me (something I didn't think could ever happen). His exact words were 'You are my son, I will never leave you' and He said it over and over again and I could hear music. I literally wanted to shout out to Jesus. This is the most amazing time of my life and I want everyone to know. I want all my friends and the people I work with to know".

2.5 (USA) How Prayer Changed a Campus

"I was hanging out with my friend Aimee¹ when she told me a very strange thing. She said that she had to leave for an 'appointment with God'. Something inside me was curious, so when she invited me to come along to the Prayer Room, I did. During our hour, I accepted Christ and I cannot tell you how life-changing the experience has been for me.

Since that day, I have returned to the 24-7 Prayer Room a few times and God has truly shown himself to me in huge and marvelous ways. You see, I am a kid who grew up with an abusive dad and I believed that I could therefore never experience the love of a father. But God has shown me differently. I have felt so loved and now experience peace everyday knowing that my heavenly Father is with me. I didn't ever think this was something I could feel.

¹ Names have been changed.

During one of my visits to the prayer room, I saw a card on the wall asking people to pray 'for the lost'. It was humbling to me to read that because I realized that people I didn't know had been praying for me when I was lost.

I live in a Fraternity house at Bluffton University, Ohio, and I couldn't get my frat brothers off my mind. Aimee explained that now that I was a Christian I had been called to seek others out and tell them of the great love I am experiencing. So she prayed that I would have boldness and courage to do this at school.

I began to pray that all thirty-three of my frat brothers would give their lives to Christ. And one by one, they did! It was a little bit crazy. Every couple of days another guy would come and ask me to pray with him or tell me that he had already prayed. How exciting it was for me to watch the transformation in my Fraternity house. It had been a place dedicated to anything that didn't honor God, but now we were singing worship songs in our living room! God took over our house and there was no turning back. By the time we left for Christmas break everyone except Tim had become a Christian.

During break, Aimee was house-sitting and invited Tim over for dinner. By the end of the night he too had placed his faith in Christ as his Savior. Thirty-four frat brothers in less than six months. What a mighty God!

Little did we know how perfect God's timing was in all of this. Twenty-seven days after Tim placed his faith in Christ, just after Christmas, he was involved in a fatal automobile accident and went to be with Jesus.

In the 27 days before Tim died, he had been consumed with concern for his parents who did not yet share his newfound Christian faith. But at his funeral, Tim's parents and fifteen of his high school football team-mates decided to trust Christ and follow Him.

I believe all of this happened because there were people in the 24-7 prayer room praying for the lost. I praise God for the church and their faithful obedience to God demonstrated through prayer.”

‘Of all things, guard against neglecting God in the secret place of prayer.’

(William Wilberforce)

3. MODELS OF CORPORATE PRAYER:

'The man who mobilizes the Christian church to pray will make the greatest contribution to world evangelization in history.' (**Andrew Murray**)

There are so many new and exciting ways in which people are joining together in prayer for the world and so our hope is that, by sharing the models of prayer we use at Holy Trinity Brompton, we will equip you to:

- Become more effective in prayer
- Become more strategic in coordinating the corporate prayer life of your church
- Get every member of your church excited about and actively engaged in the priestly mission of the church

In this section we will describe six practical models of corporate prayer which can be reproduced in churches of any size:

- 3.1 How to Run Really Great Prayer Meetings
- 3.2 Social Justice Prayer Briefings
- 3.3 Prayer Networks
- 3.4 24-7 Prayer Rooms
- 3.5 Prayer Concerts
- 3.6 Years of Prayer
- 3.7 The Lord's Prayer at Noon

PRAYER MODEL #1: HOW TO RUN REALLY GREAT PRAYER MEETINGS

*“Again I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in Heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them – **Matthew 18: 19***

The first Christians knew that prayer meetings are exciting and we don't think anything has changed! On one occasion the room in which they were meeting shook with the power of their prayers. On another occasion Peter was miraculously rescued from prison by their prayers. Jesus had told them that when they came together in His name he would attend, and that when they agreed together in His name, He would hear their prayers and perform miracles. No wonder the instinct of the early church, whenever they faced trials, was simply to raise their voices together in prayer.

Our weekly prayer meeting at HTB Brompton Road runs from 7-8am on a Tuesday morning in the church building. It is the basic building block of our corporate prayer life as a church. The number one aim in leading these prayer meetings is to make sure that they are never ever boring! We do this in four ways:

1. by breaking the hour down into short 'bite-size' sections,
2. by deploying different models and styles of prayer throughout (see below)
3. by focusing on different issues: personal, local, national, global
4. by blending worship and space for prophetic input in with the prayers too.

Six Types of Prayer for Prayer Meetings:

1. **ABC:** A great way to actively engage everyone in a prayer meeting is to sometimes split the group down into threes, asking each person to allocate themselves 'A', 'B' or 'C'. Having done this, give three specific prayer pointers, relating to a particular issue, allocating one request for A's, one for B's and one for C's. This multiplies the prayer and engages everyone. Each person at the prayer meeting then knows what they are praying about and instead of just one big prayer meeting you end up with lots of smaller groups all praying at once.
2. **Worship:** Of course many of our prayers can be sung, and we are told to bring our petitions before the Lord with thanksgiving and to enter his courts with praise. Therefore, during the prayer meeting try to ebb and flow between sung worship times and intercession, with music playing in the background throughout.
3. **Crying out:** Jesus sometimes prayed 'in a loud voice' and we are told that the early church also: 'raised their voices together in prayer to God'. Today, wherever the church is growing fastest, it models simultaneous corporate prayer. So even if it feels uncomfortable or unnatural at first, we undoubtedly have something to learn about raising our voices in prayer; from Jesus, from the early church and from our brothers and sisters today in places like South Korea, Indonesia, Nigeria, China and Argentina.

Praying simultaneously is much more efficient since we believe that God can hear each one of us, and it's more engaging than listening passively to long speeches from

others until we eventually say 'Amen' at the end. Praying aloud together is also a great way of stirring ourselves to get passionate about things that really matter. You will find it helpful to play music in the background when you pray in this way and it can be important to prime people and to give them a clear prayer focus – something really inspiring.

We will also often encourage people to think of a particular biblical promise to claim if they are not sure what else to say. And the moment that voices start to die down, (I'm afraid that for us this is often after merely a minute or two) be ready to move on to the next thing or flow into a worship song.

4. **50/50:** Another way to engage everyone in prayer (and to make the 'Crying Out' model a little easier) is to split the group in half, asking one side to raise their voices and cry out to God about a particular issue whilst the other half of the room sings in worship. Then, after a verse or a chorus, swap sides. This is a good way of combining thanksgiving with intercession.
5. **Zones:** You could also split the room into zones and focus the prayers in each section onto a different topic or aspect of a single theme. This might simply involve making 3 or 4 posters with particular prayer points on each one, and sticking these up on different pillars or walls of the building. Allow enough time for people to move around the room praying silently or quietly into whichever of the issues they choose. It's a good idea to have instrumental music playing softly in the background to make the silence

less intimidating. Every few minutes you may like to encourage people to move on to the next zone.

6. **Petitioning the King:** This model of prayer involves placing a chair at the front of the room with its back facing the crowd. Having done this, remind people of the seriousness of prayer and the honour of coming into the presence of a Holy King with our requests. You may like to provide some historical context by mentioning the biblical story of Esther who was afraid that she might be struck dead if her request displeased King Xerxes.

Next, simply ask people to imagine that the chair is a throne and that God is lovingly and graciously inviting them to request of him just one specific thing. What would that supreme request be? Then play music and make space for people to come, one at a time, to kneel before Christ's throne and make their petition reverently to the King. This can be very powerful and emotional as long as it isn't done too often.

An example agenda of a typical hour-long prayer meeting, using these different types of prayer is available at <http://alphafriends.org/praying-your-course>.

*I attend the HTB prayer meeting because I believe that when we pray God hears us in heaven and things happen. Things change because we get up, get together and pray. It's the highlight of my week – **Rev. Bill Cahusac***

PRAYER MODEL #2: SOCIAL JUSTICE PRAYER BRIEFINGS

It was a normal church prayer meeting at our annual 'Focus' church holiday. A friend who had recently set up a charity to fight human trafficking in India happened to be present and so we asked him to come and say a few words so that we could support his endeavour with 5 minutes of prayer. He's a successful businessman; a very competent and 'together' sort of person, but when he tried to speak he simply broke down in tears. He couldn't say a word. He just wept. And as he did so, a great seriousness entered the room. It was as though we caught something of God's heart for the children who are crying out to him for help. We realised then and there that we simply had to start praying regularly for the things that break God's heart. We had to put our prayers where our preaching is.

The prophet Isaiah insists that we must not separate our prayer lives from the lives of those who are hurting and oppressed (ch. 58). The apostle Paul reminds us that 'Our battle is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers in high places' (Eph 6:18) As well as engaging with major world issues practically we believe that God's people must wrestle with them prayerfully.

To do this we produce a monthly 'Prayer Briefing' which focuses the intercessions of the church on a particular social justice issue such as *Human Trafficking, the AIDS crisis, The Persecuted Church, Caring for the Environment, Broken Families at Christmas and Peace in the Middle East*.

Each briefing is included in the monthly church information guide so that everyone who attends a service hears about it. The briefing

combines relevant scriptures, key facts supplied by experts in the field and specific prayer pointers. As well as encouraging church members to pray throughout the month about this particular social justice issue, we also devote one of our weekly prayer meetings to the theme and invite a knowledgeable person to come and help inform our prayers. One of the exciting implications of doing this is that people who might not normally attend the prayer meeting may well be galvanised to attend when we are addressing an issue about which they care passionately.

Steps for creating a Prayer Briefing:

- 1. Choose the topic** – Are people in your church passionate about any particular issues? Are there any national campaigns you could support in prayer? Are there local issues of injustice in your community or city which need to be addressed? These could be anything from gun-crime on the streets to the closing down of neighbourhood schools.
- 2. Research the issue** – It's important that the Briefing wins 'hearts and minds' in order to motivate prayer. Therefore take time to research and find powerful statistics and moving stories to inform and inspire prayer.
- 3. Prepare the briefing and prayer points** – Collate and summarise everything you have researched into a few bullet points and verses with perhaps one short story. It's important not to overwhelm people with information. Seven prayer points, one for every day of the week, is ideal. Keep it simple and compelling. Disseminate this information through church news-sheets, website, Facebook, emails to your prayer Network (see below) or create a special leaflet which can be handed out on

Sundays for attachment to fridges, notice-boards or insertion in bibles.

4. **Invite a guest** – If you know of a non-profit linked to the topic you are praying about see if there is someone who might come and offer a ten minute interview as part of your prayer meeting. Alternatively you may have someone in your community who is already knowledgeable and compelling on the subject.
5. **Publicise your prayer meeting** – Encourage your congregation that if they care about the issue and want to make a difference they really can do so by coming to the special prayer meeting.

To see an example of an HTB prayer briefing go to www.htb.org.uk/ministry/prayer/prayer-briefings

‘We are convinced it was that morning praying [about human trafficking] at HTB, a couple of weeks ago that has caused the tide to turn in our favour. So much so, in the last raid, the Additional Commissioner of Police sent in his own special force team with the raid. – Ashley Varghese, Justice & Care International

PRAYER MODEL #3: Prayer Networks

A child is suddenly struck down on the way to school and she is lying in a critical condition in hospital. A new Christian is struggling with his faith. Members of a Global Alpha Training (GAT) team have all contracted food poisoning. Sunday’s preacher has lost his voice.

Some prayer requests just can’t wait for the weekly prayer meeting. Others are too confidential for public broadcast. And

anyway, whenever and wherever you hold the church prayer meeting, it will always be an impossible time or place for some church members to attend, no matter how much they may want to pray.

It's so exciting, therefore, that we live at a time when it is possible to connect and communicate instantly and affordably at the touch of a few buttons, and we can use this to mobilise prayer.

When we surveyed the HTB congregations three years ago we discovered that many people wanted to grow in prayer and were keen to be given prayer requests too. What was particularly interesting was the discovery that the number of people expressing a hunger for prayer was more than four times higher than the number attending the weekly prayer meeting.

So we launched a prayer network called **PrayerForce** which identifies those church members with a heart for prayer and sends them regular confidential prayer alerts via email, text, Facebook or a password protected website. In return we try to help them grow in their own prayer lives by arranging occasional quiet day retreats, arranging teaching events and sending out a newsletter which includes quotes, testimonies of answered prayer, and extracts from helpful books.

One of the great things about the PrayerForce model is that it can work in a very small church where there might be just 3 people with a heart for prayer, or in a large church where there may be many hundreds.

'An exciting part of Prayerforce is getting the emails and knowing that I make a difference by praying individually. I'm a student so I

don't have the time to attend everything at HTB so Prayerforce is one way that I make a difference'

PRAYER MODEL #4: 24-7 Prayer Rooms

24-7 Prayer is one of the most exciting and creative expressions of prayer at HTB. We arrange regular seasons of 24-7 (night-and-day) prayer in a specially decorated room on site. People can sign up to take an hour-long shift in the prayer room, and we thereby fill days and even weeks with non-stop intercession and praise as part of the global 24-7 Prayer movement. This has been going for more than a decade in multiple locations continually.

We are currently hoping to expand our 24-7 prayer seasons at HTB to start praying continually throughout the year. Since Alpha ministries operate all over the world, it makes perfect sense to have a prayer room that is functioning at the heart of everything, beating night-and-day, in which we can respond to prayer requests from any time zone on earth, whenever they come in.

*In Albania when we started the first 24-7 prayer room it coincided with the start of Alpha and the start of our training centre for leadership and both ministries are very successful. We credit it all really to the 24-7 prayer room – **Hervin Fushiati, Albania***

What is 24-7 Prayer?

The 24-7 prayer room model is a simple idea. It's just praying without stopping, in one-hour shifts, night-and-day, around the clock, in a room or space that's been set aside as a 'prayer room'. Groups tend to pray like this for anything from 24 hours up to many

months. The room is decorated creatively to inspire prayer, engaging as many of the senses as possible, and enabling people to experiment with different styles and types of prayer.

A season of 24-7 Prayer provides a place, a time, a context and a catalyst for prayer. It's a practical tool helping ordinary people to pray. Many who would consider themselves bad at praying turn up for their hour slot in the prayer room and then stay for two. One is rarely enough.

The 24-7 model of night and day prayer has been field-tested exhaustively since 1999 in many nations, most denominations and locations as diverse as English cathedrals, a van in the slums of Delhi and brewery in Missouri. It's especially exciting when 24-7 Prayer leads up to an Alpha Course or even runs concurrently. Countless people have emerged from prayer rooms to report that God spoke to them in life changing ways, or that they found prayer easier, or that an hour felt like ten minutes. Even non-Christians have often experienced God's presence.

Where did the idea come from?

Church history reveals that 24-7 Prayer vigils have always been used powerfully by God:

- 2000 years ago: the church was born in a 24-7 prayer room in Jerusalem!
- 1000 years ago: Celtic monasteries prayed 24-7 and transformed Europe
- 300 years ago: Moravians prayed 24-7 for 100 years and took the gospel to many nations
- 105 years ago: a multi racial 24-7 prayer room on Azusa street in Los Angeles sparked the global Pentecostal and charismatic renewal

Such historical precedents make it even more exciting that a new generation is discovering the power of 24-7 prayer, especially when it is twinned with Alpha.

To find out more about 24-7 Prayer and how to set up a prayer room:

- www.24-7Prayer.com.
- *The 24-7 Prayer Manual* explains how to organise a season of non-stop prayer
- *Red Moon Rising* tells the exciting story of how the 24-7 Prayer movement began.

“A group of students at St Andrew’s University set up a 24-7 prayer room at Holy Trinity church. They followed this with an Alpha Launch party at the Old Course Hotel (home of golf). As a result of the Prayer Room the Alpha Course at St Andrews changed dramatically. The students said that Alpha feels different now and the Christians are even more united.” Nick Guy (Scotland)

PRAYER MODEL #5: PRAYER CONCERTS

One of the most exciting ways of praying can be to arrange a Prayer Concert combining worship with prayer, space to be still and listen to God, and also gaps when people can share their own testimonies and impressions with the group.

The Psalms are an extraordinary combination of adoration, thanksgiving, lamentation, petition and intercession, written mostly for corporate singing and recitation. The divide between ‘worship’ and ‘prayer’ is often a false one – they are really two sides of the same coin. After all, the apostle Paul advises us to bring our petitions before the Lord with thanksgiving.

To make prayer concerts really flow, it's important that the worship leader and the prayer leader work closely together and are flexible, open to the leading of the Spirit. Speaking should be kept to a minimum – this is not a mini church service and no-one wants a sermon! Other than a short introduction at the beginning to help focus faith, try to keep talk, rules and liturgy to a minimum. You will find a natural flow emerges between worship and prayer, thanksgiving and petition, noise and silence.

Prayer and Fasting

Twice a year (between our biannual 'Vision Sunday' and 'Gift Sunday') we call the church to a day of prayer and fasting. It is a way of coming together as a community to focus our prayers on the vision and ministries God has given us. The day begins with our regular Tuesday prayer meeting from 7-8am and concludes twelve hours later, from 7-8pm with a prayer concert led by Tim Hughes and Pete Greig. After this event, everyone is encouraged to go and break their fast in groups, perhaps in one of the nearby restaurants.

Fasting humbles us and brings us to an awareness of our need of God. It renews the sense of balance and priority in our walk with God. It heightens our spiritual sensitivity and clears the channels of communication with God. It hits at our deep-seated selfishness and strengthens our self control. Having a dedicated time of prayer and fasting is not a way of manipulating God into doing what you desire. Rather, it is simply forcing yourself to focus and rely on God for the strength, provision, and wisdom you need.

Special Occasions

Every year at HTB we also hold a New Year Prayer Concert which offers the congregation an alternative to the usual New Years Eve parties. It's an opportunity to focus on Jesus, a time to look back on the year that has passed and to pray for the year ahead. We celebrate with great worship, lots of fun, prayers, moments of quiet reflection and a satellite link-up to Big Ben at midnight.

We encourage churches to hold special prayer events as part of the annual Alpha Invitation campaign (see section 4).

PRAYER MODEL #6: Years of Prayer

Why not join thousands of other churches from around the UK in taking part in the 2012 Year of Prayer? One nation, joined together in constant prayer for the evangelization of the nations and the transformation of society.

- In 2010 Scottish Alpha churches combined with others in a year of unbroken 24-7 Prayer throughout the country. The initiative was known as 'The Big If...' – a reference to 2 Chronicles 7:14 'If my people...'
- Meanwhile, in 2010, Alpha USA partnered with 24-7 Prayer to catalyze prayer on hundreds of US campuses.
- In 2011 a similar Year of Prayer is taking place throughout Ireland.

KC:UK2012 - Four nations, one year of 24-7Prayer. "Your Kingdom Come"

UK: In 2012 we are inviting all 7000 Alpha churches in the UK to come together for an unbroken year of prayer throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, filling the Olympic year with

unprecedented intercession for the nation. For more details on how to set up your 24-7 prayer room and to get involved in the 2012 year of prayer go to <http://www.alphafriends.org>

Global: In 2012 we are mobilising prayer globally with each of the 50 Alpha offices taking responsibility for at least one week of 24-7 prayer to fill the year with a global chorus of prayer for the Alpha vision. To find out more go to <http://www.alphafriends.org>

PRAYER MODEL #7: THE LORD'S PRAYER AT NOON

The 'Our Father' is the best-known prayer in the world and we are rediscovering its power. On Easter day alone some two billion people pray or sing these words, first taught by Jesus to the disciples in response to the request, 'Lord, teach us to pray'. In fact, when the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, was asked how he would summarise the entire teaching of Christianity on the back of an envelope he answered without hesitation that he would simply write the words of The Lord's Prayer.

With the growth of the 24-7 Prayer networks around the world, many people have developed a daily discipline of pausing each day at noon, in order to pray the 'Our Father'. Christians in so many time zones are now making this a personal discipline that we will soon be a giant global chorus, beginning every hour of every day with the words Christ Himself taught us.

Praying the Lord's Prayer at noon is just another tool, alongside the Bible in One Year and a regular visit to a 24-7 Prayer Room, which can help us all to practice the presence of God in our lives 24 hours a day and seven days a week. Of course, sometimes when your alarm goes off on your cell phone at noon, it is inconvenient to pause and pray. In many ways that is the whole point; we want our

busy-ness to be rudely and regularly interrupted by a reminder of our deepest priorities in life.

One of the vergers at HTB said that this particular discipline has been the most helpful prayer model he's ever tried because it helps him to remember God in the middle of his working day and to really remember who he is working for.

Of course, such disciplines in prayer do not have to be legalistic 'vain repetition'. In fact they can be liberating and life-giving. As a God-fearing Jew Jesus would certainly have paused three times every day to pray the Sh'ma: 'Hear, O Israel...' Such liturgical disciplines have been integral to Christian prayer from the start. For instance we know that the first believers still attended the daily prayer meetings at the temple. It was on the way to one of these prayer meetings that Peter and John healed the beggar at the gate called Beautiful (Acts 3:1). And in the didache – a letter instructing churches in how to worship written around the year 100AD – Christians are encouraged to pray the Lord's Prayer not just once but three times a day (presumably instead of the Jewish sh'ma). It's thrilling to think that by praying the Lord's Prayer at Noon we are discovering an ancient discipline which connects us with Christians around the world and back down 2000 years to the very birth of the church.

4. PRAYER AND THE ALPHA COURSE

Prayer lies at the heart of any Alpha course. We want to empower the (re)evangelization of the nations and transformation of society by catalysing, connecting and resourcing Christ centred, mission-minded prayer in every Alpha church around the world. In this section we outline three specific ways in which you can increase the prayer underpinning your Course.

- Prayer for the Alpha Invitation
- Prayer for Alpha Course guests
- Prayer for Alpha Mission Trips (GAT)

4.1 Prayer for the Alpha Invitation

Every year a thrilling invitation goes out to the nation to come and explore the really big issues of Life on an Alpha Course. Underpinning the national advertising campaign, is an army of ordinary people organising thousands of local Alpha Courses, booking venues, cooking meals, preparing to lead discussion groups, and inviting their friends.

But the story of the Alpha Invitation doesn't end there. Just as the real power behind the advertising campaign is the army of volunteers, so the real power behind the success of the Alpha Course is an army of prayer warriors who understand that this is not just about marketing. Behind the humorous talks, the pasta suppers and the cartoon illustrations is a real spiritual battle for hearts and minds.

Research in the UK revealed that there is an almost exact correlation between the amount of prayer mobilised for Alpha Courses and the number of guests who attend the courses. As God says to King Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty.' (Zechariah 4:6)

So why not hold a prayer and worship event to launch your Alpha course? Or maybe you could join with other churches in your local area to host a joint Alpha Launch prayer event. Resources to help you organise and run your Prayer & Worship launch event can be found at <http://alphafriends.org/praying-your-course>

4.2 Prayer for Alpha Course Guests

The hosts and helpers who facilitate the discussion groups on an Alpha Course are best positioned to pray for the guests in their groups because they will come to know the names and needs of each individual in a way that no-one else can. It is essential therefore that hosts and helpers really do pray regularly for their guests. There are at least three ways this can be done:

- 1. Daily:** Aim to pray daily for the members of your group by name in your own personal devotional time. You may find it helpful to keep a list and make a few notes of anything the Lord shows you.
- 2. Weekly:** The whole Alpha team should allow enough time to meet each week before the guests arrive for a briefing and prayer meeting. This is particularly important for the session 'Does God heal today?', as the team can wait on the Lord for words of knowledge, pictures and so on. These can then be read out after the talk and people who respond to them can be offered prayer.

- 3. Occasionally:** It's a great idea for hosts and helpers to meet together occasionally apart from Alpha nights in order to pray for those in their small groups in an unhurried, less pressurised way.

While the hosts and helpers must take primary responsibility for praying for their guests, there may well be others in the church who would be willing to pray for the Alpha Course. Some churches therefore circulate prayer lists via email, and others have designed their own prayer bookmarks for the Alpha Course as a helpful reminder.

*We were a small team, running Alpha in a small rural church with about 8 guests, on and off each week! We had 2 hosts and 2 helpers and a great task force. We all met up before the course started to train and pray for the course and guests. Each week we prayed ahead of the session. We could not have done it without prayer. The leaders were able to make it every week, despite much need to travel during the course. All the team worked together wonderfully and we had a real sense that God was carrying us all through. Encourage teams, however small to pray and wait on the Lord for words or pictures ahead of the healing session. We did just this at the prayers before the session. One of the leaders had a word about an ear problem. We later shared that with the Alpha group, but nothing was said. At the end of the evening one of the helpers came up and said that she had been suffering with tinnitus for years but said nothing earlier as she thought the word could only be for one of the guests! What an encouragement it was to her and to us all. It builds up expectation and faith for the future too. We were so pleased that we waited on the Lord for whatever He wished to say to us. - **Rebecca Taylor, Warwickshire, UK***

4.3 Prayer for Mission Trips (GAT)

‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’

(Luke 10:1-2)

Prayer and evangelisation go hand in hand. When you are going on a mission trip you are God’s hands and feet going out and spreading the good news. It is therefore important to ensure that you, your team and the trip itself are adequately supported in prayer at every stage from the planning right through to when you return. Here then are some ways in which you can ensure your trip is covered in prayer:

1. **Pray regularly as a team** – Prayer is the most important thing you can do in preparing for an event. It ensures that at every stage you are keeping your focus on Jesus and brings you closer together as a team.
2. **Set up a prayer wheel** - Before you go ask people to commit to praying for your event for one hour each day. Knowing that people are praying for you while you are away is a great comfort.
3. **Have one point of contact back home** - Instead of sending lots of emails to different people designate one person as your point of contact who you can send prayer requests to who can then distribute them to everyone who is praying for you while you are away. This person could also send you any prophetic pictures or words of knowledge which people have had for the team. It’s always great to receive words of encouragement.

4. **Pray morning and night during the trip** – It's a great idea during your daily prayer meetings to check how everyone is doing. You are going out to do amazing things but this can be very challenging and tiring. Issues which may normally be small and easy to handle may become magnified so it's vital to pray together and check regularly how everyone is.
5. **Share stories** – While you are away you are going to hear all sorts of amazing stories and you'll see and hear amazing answers to prayer. Share the stories! Hearing that their prayers have been answered will build the faith of everyone who has been praying for you while you been away. It will also inspire others to step out of their comfort zone and go on a mission trip.

Case study – Global Alpha Training Team pray for prison inmates, Zambia

'What a wonderful experience the prison visit was. We thought we might just see a few inmates who were doing the Alpha Course. We were escorted into the Prison courtyard where 1052 inmates were ready and waiting to hear about Alpha, wanting to receive some verses from the bible and some prayers of hope and blessings into their lives. At the end when we said the "sorry, thank you, please" prayer, just in case one person wanted to give their life to Christ, we asked "how many people responded to that prayer" and 80% of the inmates put up their hands. Wow! What an emotional experience this was. We did not take Jesus into the prison; He was already there - big time!'

5. PRAYER RESOURCES

Recommended books

The Art of Prayer (SU) by Timothy Jones

The Church on Its Knees (Alpha) by Jeremy Jennings

The 24-7 Prayer Manual (Cook)

Intercessory Prayer (Regal) by Dutch Sheets

Red Moon Rising (Cook) by Pete Greig & Dave Roberts

God on Mute (Kingsway) by Pete Greig

Listening to God (Hodder) by Joyce Huggett

Recommended online Resources

www.24-7Prayer.com

www.htb.org.uk/prayer

The Lord's Prayer Teaching Series from HTB by Pete Greig: A nine part journey through the 'Our Father' exploring different aspects and approaches to prayer. Available from: www.htb.org.uk/media

Bible in One Year with Nicky Gumbel www.htb.org.uk/one-year-bible

Resources currently under development

The Prayer Course: A 5-10 week journey for small groups going deeper in prayer.

For more information email prayer@htb.org.uk

*'Now to him who is
able to do immeasurably more
than all we ask or imagine, according
to his power that is at work within us, to
him be glory in the church and in Christ
Jesus throughout all generations,
forever and ever! Amen.'*

(Ephesians 3:20-21)

Alpha & 24-7Prayer

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