SF 710 The Life of Prayer

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Course Description

"This course proposes to interpret and apply the biblical principle of "pray without ceasing." In addition to examining various dimensions of prayer, the course also explores ways that one's whole life can be prayerful. Students will be introduced to theoretical and practical dimensions including a small group practicum component."

Texts

*The Praying Church Sourcebook*, Alvin Vander Griend (ISBN1-56212-258-4)

Course Objectives and Purposes

(1) You will demonstrate knowledge of Jesus' teachings on prayer.

(2) You will be able to discuss basic premises informing a Christian approach to and practice of prayer.

(3) You will practice intentional patterns of engagement with God, privately as well as communally.

(4) You will devise a strategy and create resources that will enable you to teach prayer to others.

Grading System

Grading will be on a "contract" basis. It is up to you to decide your "grade goal" for the course in the light of all the other commitments in your life.

My educational philosophy informs the way I approach grading for this kind of course. You are "adult learners." Based on the principles of Androgogy (Malcolm Knowles), I try to provide the kind of course requirements which help you achieve goals
which are important to you and which will help you grow in your life of prayer. When papers are submitted I typically give feedback to encourage, challenge, and/or make suggestions to help you continue growing. I've noticed that by working in this way, I rarely have to worry about the quality of the material that is submitted. The subject itself, and one's own desire to grow, takes care of all of that. This gives me the chance to be your "coach" or "spiritual guide", rather than your "judge" or "critic."

Grades are not ultimately awarded solely on the basis of the contract made, but upon the quality of work you've done at the performance level chosen. However, people who submit the work for the level they have chosen are almost always awarded the grade for that level. How can this be? If the assignment has not followed the guidelines or is (in my view) inadequate, I will return it with comments which will give you a chance to re-work and re-submit your essay or project. I want you to succeed!

Expectations

C-Level (60/65)
- read texts (20 points)
- prepare and follow a "Rule of Prayer" (5 points)
- maintain a "Prayer Journal" (4 of 7 days a week) (20 points)
- engage in weekly class discussions over the assigned materials
- write a paper presenting your "prayer experiment(s)" this semester (15 points)
- work with your group to create an attractive and usable "prayer station" that has a clear focus, utilizes a three-fold presentation board, makes use of visual aids, includes a prayer guide, prayer suggestions, or prayer notebook (5 points)

B-Level (75/80)
- complete "C-level components and, in addition...
- prepare an essay between 4 - 6 pages in length, addressing some issue or aspect of prayer, or a problem you have had with prayer. You will prepare a one page precis of your essay for members of your group. Each person will read and respond (in a letter) to the essays of others in his/her group. (15)

A-Level (93/100)
- complete "C" and "B" level components and, in addition...
- design a strategy and create a resource for teaching prayer in your setting. This could be teaching material for a "School of Prayer" or a series of classes on the subject, a "workbook" on one section of Prayer, The Hearts True Home, or some other approach/resource for which you receive my approval.
- prepare material that local church prayer leaders could use as a resource for their efforts in developing a prayer ministry, or in planning a prayer event. More information will be provided in class.

For the “A-level” you will commit a minimum of ten hours to the preparation of either of these integrative projects. (20 points)
Components

**Rule of Prayer.** A "Rule of Prayer" is a plan to which you commit yourself as a deliberate way of cultivating your conscious relationship with God and growing in your relationship with Him. Be experimental and imaginative. Don't think you have to fit into some predetermined mold. Remember that we create space for God in a variety of ways. Be realistic, but specific as you lay out your daily/weekly plan. Realize that it will not be "perfect" but that your "Rule" will probably undergo revisions as you move through the semester. You will prepare this assignment after reading the text, *Rules for Prayer.* It will be due September 23.

**Prayer Journal.** Journal entries shall be made 4 out of 7 days a week. You may keep your journal in whatever form or format you wish. I will not read this material, but will ask you to report monthly on your faithfulness to this assignment. The journal is an instrument that can encourage you to be attentive to God in everyday life. Sometimes you will use it to pray over a life experience, practice the prayer of "examen", record whatever is in your spirit after praying over a psalm, or capture the fruit of a period of meditation on a scripture. Here you will also track your "prayer experiment." Your journal will serve as a kind of continuing "lab report" for the course. As I stated above, I do not plan to read this private material. However, I always welcome you to share any entry about which you'd like me to comment. At the end of the semester, if the number of journal entries is not up to the level specified in the syllabus, it may affect your grade level a half-step (e.g., "B-" rather than "B"). If less than half the required entries are done, there will most likely be a drop to the next level (e.g., "C+" rather than "B-").

**Prayer Experiment(s)** Each student will design and engage in a "prayer experiment" (or a series of prayer experiments) over the semester--arising out of your response to God's call in some concrete area(s) of life. Your experiment may be connected to some area of personal need (e.g., the practice of discerning prayer as you seek God's direction in some significant decision in your life, learning about and practicing quiet or contemplative prayer, praying through the Psalms, etc.). Your experiment could relate to some area of responsibility you carry, some opportunity you have, some challenge you face, some situation of hurt or need which exists around you, or some discipline that you are trying to establish.

Your paper should be between 4 - 6 pages in length (double-spaced, typed), and include the following two components:

- Summary of each of your dated log of entries (taken from your Prayer Journal) tracking your "experiment(s)" from inception, up to the date of your summary paper;
- Narrative section where you reflect on what has been going on, for example, how God sensitized your heart, prompted your responses, reshaped the thrust of your praying, or has been changing your perceptions, attitudes, or actions in some observable ways. In other words, crystallize what God has shown you about prayer as you have engaged in prayer. This section should also integrate ideas that have been covered in this course through the semester. You are encouraged to share what you perceive to be your "failures" as well as your successes. Sometimes the questions (or lessons) which
arise from our struggles are just as important to our growth in faith as any of our "successes" may be!

**Prayer Essay:** This paper will be 4 - 6 pages in length, double-spaced, and typed. You will also prepare a one-page precis of this paper for the members of your group. Your assignment is to do further research on some aspect of prayer, or to address some problem with prayer with which you struggle. Footnotes and bibliography will evidence that you have gone beyond class texts in your exploration. Write cogently and present your material in a concise and well-organized fashion. This essay, along with a one-page precis of it for your group, is due October 21. Two points will be deducted for each 24 hour period that a paper is late. Allowances will, of course, be made for medical emergencies or personal crises (e.g., a death in the family).

Connected with the Prayer Essay, is an assignment to read the essay precis of your group and to write a letter to each person in response to their essay. This will be due on November 1st.

**Final Integrative Project for A-Level**

**School of Prayer.** There is a basic spiritual law that, having received so much from God, we must share it or we will lose it. It is often in the process of teaching, or in preparing to teach, that the lessons that God has been showing us are distilled. For those who decide to work at the A-Level, I want to give you the opportunity to capture Christ's gifts to you in a format for sharing His gifts. I call it a "School for Prayer." Not many people in our churches have ever been taught to pray. The need is great. Reflect on what God has been trying to teach you about prayer over the years--through your ups and downs, and through the insights that have come from readings and classes. What have you received that you could teach others in a short course? Use a notebook with seven tabbed sections to organize your project. Plan for 5 teaching sessions.

In the introductory section, describe your "imaginary setting" (e.g., five consecutive evenings, five consecutive Wednesday nights, or a nightly event beginning Sunday morning, continuing Sunday evening, and nightly through Wednesday night, etc.). List your goals--what you want your people to learn and to experience. And a brief description of the group with which you will be working: socio-economic, educational, cultural, age range, gender distribution, etc.

In tabbed sections 2-6 of your notebook, you will develop each of the five teaching sessions. In each one there needs to be at least a two-page teaching outline, handout(s) and visual aids. Each session should have both informative and experiential dimensions. Wherever possible, provide a "homework" assignment of some prayer exercise which you would ask the people to use in order to continue practicing what they have learned.
In the 7th tabbed section, list a bibliography of sources that you have used to develop your notebook and, on a separate page, a brief bibliography on prayer which you would distribute to those who attended the school.

**Workbook for Prayer, the Heart's True Home.** Since this course text is such an important resource, you may want to use it in your church. Design and write a "Workbook" for one unit in order help your people read that book attentively and responsively, and so that they will have a basis for sharing when they come together in the small group setting in which they are discussing the book. You may want to look at some of the helpful workbook formats that are available in order to gather ideas for your own approach. Present your material in a notebook with tabbed dividers. In the first section you will write a brief introduction to the workbook, explaining to the readers what it is and its potential use. Then in the next set of dividers, work with each separate chapter of the unit that you have selected. In the final tabbed section you will provide a brief bibliography pertinent to each of the lessons so that users will be directed to other sources for further reading. Note: you may wish to work with a team of other students who will prepare workbook on chapters from other units.

**Resources for Local Church Prayer Leaders** that we will put on a Web site, or make available as “kits.” Many churches are appointing “prayer coordinators” to help administer their local prayer movement. Sometimes these persons have little preparation for their job, or they may be working in places where they receive little support for what they are trying to do. The International Prayer Fellowship exists in order to train, support and network local church prayer coordinators, especially those within Methodism. This semester you may want to help us prepare “how to” resources that prayer leaders could download from our web site, or kits that they might order to help them plan for the National Day of Prayer, or some other special occasion. It is best for the web articles to be done by individuals, and kits to be prepared by small teams.

As was stated above, ten hours is the minimum effort expected for these A-level projects. Projects will be shared with our whole group during one of our final 3 class sessions.

**Due Dates for the Semester**

- Rule of Prayer, September 22
- Prayer Journals (report on progress monthly)
- Prayer Station (dates to be assigned when groups are formed)
- Prayer Essay (including a copy of a precis for each one in your small group) (B-Level only), November 1
- Response to prayer essay precis of your group, November 8
- Prayer Experiment, December 1st
- Final Integrative Project (A-level only), Web projects, a.s.a.p.; all projects on or before December 1st.