

40 DAYS

PRAYER GUIDE



catching
the
wave

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Cost
We would like this prayer guide to be used widely. Donations of £2.50 will help make this possible. Cheques made payable to *There is Hope*.
To order more copies please contact: There Is Hope, 67 Wright Street, Hull, East Yorkshire, HU2 8JD. Tel 01482 606606, email 40days@thereishope.co.uk.

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CATCHING THE WAVE

40 Days is a united concert of prayer asking God a new wave of revival. Individuals, house groups, churches, towns and cities are using this to pray together.

Besides having different topics though each week it has a daily emphasis of praying for your 'Big Issue', your '3 Friends' and to 'Catch the Wave' (pages 6&7) It also incorporates a study guide with material relating to each of the weekly topics (page 77).

Extra material is designed to provide more stimulus: Going Further in Prayer; centre pages about the place where you live, an extra prayer focus each week and revival stories to encourage you.

The Guide is designed to be used over 40 days. The first 'week' contains only 4 'days' to fit into the church calendar for Lent. Obviously it can be used at other times but bear this in mind. The rest of the weeks have 6 articles and a rest day on Sundays which gives an opportunity to reflect and catch up.

This can be seen as a prayer journey. What is important is that you meet with God, not that you rush through this guide!

Jesus encourages us, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you (Luke 11:9).

Please share stories of what happens and answers to prayer that you experience.

For more information and to share answers to prayer please contact: There Is Hope, 67 Wright Street, Hull, East Yorkshire, HU2 8JD. Tel 01482 606606, email 40days@thereishope.co.uk, Web www.40-days.com.

IMAGINE

IMAGINE WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WERE PRAYING EVERY DAY FOR 40 DAYS AND HUNDREDS OF CHURCHES UNITED IN ASKING GOD FOR HIS WILL TO BE DONE.

IMAGINE WHOLE COMMUNITIES BECOMING SATURATED WITH THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND PEOPLE FORSAKING WHAT IS WRONG, EXPERIENCING HIS LOVE AND FINDING CHRIST EVERY DAY.

IMAGINE PEOPLE BECOMING INTERESTED IN THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST AND WIDESPREAD SOCIAL CHANGE AS PEOPLE LIVE IN HOPE INSTEAD OF DESPAIR.

IMAGINE DISCOVERING GOD TO BE NEAR; ANSWERS TO PRAYER BECOMING COMMON PLACE AND CHURCH BECOMING TRULY GLORIOUS.

IMAGINE... REVIVAL

Extending your prayer life

"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests" (Ephesians 6:18).

Pray more

Pray a bit longer than usual. Try to set aside at least half an hour more every day. Rather than just praying for your own needs, pray for the needs of the area.

Pray with others

Take part in your church's programme of prayer. Commit to praying with your partner or friend. The prayer guide can be used in group prayer as well as personal prayer.

Come into his presence

Start your prayer time by making a conscious effort to come into God's presence. Open your heart to allow him to speak to you. In Rev 3:20 Jesus knocks at the door asking to come in. You can have that promised fellowship with him.

Praise and worship

Praise God at the beginning of your prayer times. Offer Him prayers of worship for who he is and thanks for what he has done. Intersperse your conversation with him with prayers of adoration and gratitude. You could even sing!

Listen

Remember that conversations are two-way! Whilst you pray and fast God may well challenge your own life. By spending more time than usual, you are giving the Holy Spirit a wonderful opportunity to show where you need to change or perhaps to inspire or empower you for some ministry.

Pray from the scriptures

The scriptures reveal God's will for mankind. Many believers find it helpful to use passages of scripture in their prayers. You can take the promises or themes and pray them into situations today.

Keep going

Keep on praying even when you don't see immediate answers. Praying for a topic once does not necessarily mean that this issue is dealt with! God may give you a determination to pray about something in particular. If so, you should keep on until you see the answer come.

Consider fasting

Fasting is a demonstration to God that you mean what you pray. It is an outward expression of the commitment that lies behind the prayer. It has been practised by the Christian church throughout its history. It was also an important part of the prayer life of many Biblical characters. People fasted: to be in God's presence ready to hear him (Acts 13:2); to seek God's special help or blessing (2 Chronicles 20:1-4, Ezra 8:21-23); to express repentance (Nehemiah 9:1-2); to petition God to fulfil his word (Daniel 9:1-3). For guidelines about fasting please see the 40 Days website www.40-days.com.

My 3 Friends

During these 40 Days you are encouraged to pray for people to become Christians. When someone comes to Christ usually someone has been praying for them.

Choose three 'friends'. These should be people you know who do not know the Lord, or who are not walking with him at present. They could be members of your family, neighbours, colleagues, friends or contacts

1

2

3

- Pray for each person specifically. Pray for their personal needs. Try to look at life from their standpoint. What are the worries and joys, pressures and decisions, dreams and fears that they face? Pray for those things.
- Pray about their spiritual life. What are the things that are keeping them away from God? Pray that God would soften their hearts and bring them to faith in Christ.
- If you are doing this as a group or with a friend pray for their three friends also. Pray that the Lord would give opportunities to share something of His love with them.
- Believe that these three people will change during the 40 days of prayer.

MY BIG ISSUE

If there is one thing that you want God to do during these 40 Days, what is it? What situation, person or trial is there in which you want to ask God to intervene? This period is a special opportunity for you to bring this need to God every day.

If it helps, write it here →

40
DAYS
Introduction

Catching the wave

Every day we want to be praying for revival in this area. The prayer below expresses the idea:

'Lord we ask that you would act not according to the poverty of what we are, or believe, but according to the greatness of who you are and what you can do.'

So each day during these 40 Days there is an item to pray called 'catching the wave.' That's where you can pray this kind of big prayer.

But what is revival?

Throughout this prayer guide there are some pages that give examples of revival. But the following is a helpful definition:

It is a sovereign work of God consisting of a powerful intensification of the Holy Spirit's normal activity* effecting large

numbers of people at the same time. It is therefore a community experience. It is occasionally preceded by an expectation that God is about to do something exceptional; it is usually preceded by an extraordinary unity and prayerfulness among Christians; and it is always accompanied by the revitalisation of the church, the conversion of large numbers of unbelievers and the diminution of sinful practices in the community.

* The Holy Spirit's normal activity is described theologically as testifying to the saviour, accentuating the doctrines of grace by convicting, converting, regenerating, sanctifying and empowering people.

Taken from Firestorm of the Lord by Stuart Piggin.

FATHER

Your arm is endued with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted.



PROTECTING

Word alive

Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

Or if he asks for a fish, will you give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Matthew 7:9-11

I remember the laughter. We were on holiday playing with an airbed on a lake: pulling, splashing and pushing each other in the water. Then came a howl of pain and blood. My sister's and my brother's heads had collided and she was bleeding profusely. My father immediately took charge and we swam back to the shore. Strong arms of both my father and elder brother carried her back to the tent where we were camping and quickly help was summoned and the injury managed.

Fatherhood. As I remember that childhood incident it was a good picture of the protection and the care of a father (and an elder brother). Strength and security gave confidence that it was going to be all right. Not all of us have experienced that from our earthly fathers, nevertheless this is the role God intends them to have. This image is what God wants us to have of him: not only present in crises, but watching over our lives in protection and love. We have a Father in heaven, as the Lord's prayer says. He longs for us to experience confidence, love and power in our relationship with him as we work our way through this life.

In the Old Testament God reveals how he feels about people. In Jeremiah, for example, he speaks to the Jews who were 'idol-ing' around. He says how gladly he would treat them as sons and give them a desirable land. He says "I thought you would call me 'father' and not turn away from following me." In the New Testament Jesus speaks of our Father in heaven observing, rewarding, caring and loving.

Here we have 40 days to get to know God better. 'Father' is waiting, watching, listening, longing for you

PRAYER POINTS

- Thank God that he is a loving, living and caring father to you.
- Many people do not have a good experience of their fathers and are suffering from the effects. Pray for someone you know (yourself?), who needs to be freed from the effects of bad fathering. Pray that they (you) will be able to forgive and discover freedom from the bondage they live with.
- Pray for the many fathers, especially young ones, who do not have a good role model of fatherhood and yet are now fathers themselves, that they will do good to their children.



Pray for your 'big issue'
Pray for your 'three friends'
Pray for a powerful new wave of God's
grace and truth in your community.

Your arm is endued with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted.

RETURNING

Word alive

This is what the LORD says:
“Stand at the crossroads
and look;
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is,
and walk in it,
and you will find rest for
your souls.

Jeremiah 6:16

Come near to God and he will come near to you. (James 4:8) There’s movement here! As Christians we can think that if we have placed our faith in Jesus then we are home and dry in relation to God. All sorted. We have all we need in Christ. We are forgiven. We are going to heaven and in fact are already experiencing eternal life now. All this is true. It’s as true as my relationship with my father: I will always be his son; he will always be my father. Nothing can ever change either of those statements.

However if God says we should come near then it implies we have moved away! At the very least there is an invitation to come closer. Distance can come in our relation with God, just as there can be distance with friends or family. A coldness can come, an awkwardness in his presence or when we pray we’re not really on speaking terms. Lack of communication allows ‘ice’ to form. There can be specific issues of offence, failure or disappointment that cause distance and need to be cleared. In fact even standing still brings distance from God. Our ‘walk’ with God is always a journey towards God.

In the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15) God is portrayed as a father waiting for his son to return. No failure or sin is too great. His love compels him to watch for his son’s return and to give him a lavish welcome. It is the same with us. So we are invited to make a move, to return. If we fail in this then we live uncomfortably with the distance – and like the prodigal – we’re deprived of the good that God would do. Drawing close to God is what we do as Christians.

Go for a walk today – a soul walk. Start from where you are and move towards God.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for a greater intimacy with God.
- Pray for those who need to return to God – the ‘prodigals’ in your family or the family of a friend. Pray that they will long for what they have lost and begin their ‘return.’
- Pray for a greater understanding of what God is like among people in your church so that there will be many who return to the full experience of him in their lives. Pray for a greater depth to the life of the church.



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ADOPTING

Word alive

See what great love the Father
has lavished on us, that we
should be called children of God!
And that is what we are!

1 John 3:1

**For you created my inmost
being; you knit me together in
my mother’s womb. I praise
you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made; your works
are wonderful, I know that full
well.**

Psalms 139:13-14

I cried. I knew it was going to happen. For months it had been expected. But when the twins were born I cried. There’s something about seeing new life brought into the world that does this. Our children were brought into our family with all its love, characteristics and quirks! Interestingly, there is something about becoming parents that we have inherited from God (Ephesians 3:15).

Jesus describes the process of becoming a Christian as becoming a child of God. God has children – those who receive (or believe in) his Son Jesus (John 1:12). Think about this for a minute: when we become Christians we are adopted into God’s family. We take on the family characteristics and have its privileges:

- We have a new family – a good one (John 8:35, Hebrews 2:11)
- We have a new Father – the best there could be (Matthew 7:11)
- We have a new status – children of royalty (1 Peter 2:9, 10)
- We have a new access – so we can receive the mercy and help he gives (Hebrews 4:16)

So how do we feel about ourselves today? Low self esteem? Feeling we don’t really count? Not worth being taken seriously? Perhaps instead we should remember we are children of God: having the most amazing Father caring for us. He is ensuring that we will become like him; sharing in the family characteristics of love, holiness, power and kindness. We matter to God. We are his children.

PRAYER POINTS

- Take some time to consider what it means for you to be a child of God. Thank God for what is true of you as a Christian. Put away everything that undermines your confidence in your relationship with your heavenly Father.
- Pray for those in your church who are ‘at the edge’; not quite sure that they are yet children of God (yourself?) Pray that they will have an experience of the ‘Spirit of sonship’ when God’s Spirit tells them they are God’s children (Romans 8:15,16).



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Word alive

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 1:17-20

KNOWING

In the 1992 Olympics Derek Redmond was tipped for a medal in the 400m. Immediately after the start of the race he experienced a ham-string injury. In that moment all the years of preparation and training came to an end. But he was determined to finish the course and began to hobble along in immense pain.

It was at this point that a figure pushed through the crowd onto the track. It was his father. He had realised that Derek was going to finish the race, come what may. So he put his arms round Derek and the two of them hobbled along together with Derek burying his head on his father's shoulder. There was a great cheer when they crossed the finishing line.

Derek says of his father: 'I'm very, very close to my father. He has a massive influence on my life. He was never my coach but he came to every race. He was everything else. My motivator, my hero, my pal, my bodyguard, my physio and my masseur some days. You name it, he was it.'

Jesus knew his Father in heaven. He said some striking things about that relationship, but most astonishing is that he invited us to join in the relationship they had together. In a single phrase Jesus says something that turns most religion on its head: 'Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent' (John 17:3).

Jesus was saying that people can know God personally. Being a Christian is not a matter of being religious but having a relationship. We can know God, not just things about him, because he is our Father.

(If the idea of knowing God personally is new to you then find out how to begin this relationship by looking at the website www.40-days.com.)



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FATHER TO THE FATHERLESS

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.

Psalm 68:5

Pray for the hundreds of thousands of children growing up without a father, that God will bring into their lives an understanding of him as father.

Fathers make up a significant proportion of the population of your area. They have responsibilities in their households and in the community. Good fathers are needed to be good role models for young people where we live. Similarly we need spiritual fathers (and mothers) to be role models to bring godly values and demonstrate Christian principles. They can be bringers of order, compassion and Christian love into the community. Pray for Spiritual 'fathers' for our community.

Ask for God's grace for those caught up in pornography, especially on the Internet. Pray that Christians who need help will take the step of making themselves accountable to friends or family and find

support for themselves and their partners. Pray that people will voice concerns about inappropriate images including music, film and written material which is displayed and broadcast in public places and through the media.

Pray for any couples you know who are experiencing the pain of childlessness.

Pray for all women considering an abortion. Ask God to show them the implications of this for their unborn babies, their own physical and emotional health and their families. Pray for God's encouragement and equipping for all who are involved in Christian pregnancy crisis centres, offering advice and practical support. Pray that women thinking of termination would have the courage and support they need to choose to continue their pregnancy and if necessary, allow their child to be brought up by another family.

TURNING AWAY

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:33

Pray for those around us with addictions often associated with compulsive psychological needs. Alcohol dependency is rife and wrong attitudes to money, sex and power fuel addictions such as pornography and gambling. Some people suffer the more acute effects of addictions. Drug addicts often lack money having to resort to theft to

feed their habit. They may suffer the pain of withdrawal. Drug dependency causes many deaths through overdoses or suicide. Pray for addictions to be broken.

Pray about the increasing problem of debt which causes much hardship and stress. Ask God to prompt people to seek the necessary help support and from debt counsellors and organisations. Ask him to show people how live within their means and pay back what they owe.

For further ideas on praying for your area see insert on centre pages

Deeper...

'If we want something we have never had then we need to do something that we've never done.'

We'd love God to drop revival down from heaven: the complete thing in one easy-to-open package! We would love the sort of church growth that there has been in Korea and Argentina. But are we prepared to do something new to bring about revival? Perhaps our expectation of, and preparation for, revival should start with ourselves.

Let us ask God, 'What do you want me to do?' We may need to go deeper in prayer, to come to a place of honesty and brokenness before him. A breakthrough in areas of our lives in which we struggle may be necessary. Praying all night, fasting, or meeting with other churches to pray might be what is needed to bring about a new level of fruitfulness.

Wider...

When we pray for revival we think of a move of God touching all levels of society. God in his sovereignty will choose how, when and where this might happen. But historians have identified that certain activities tend to precede revivals. J. Edwin Orr points to **extra-ordinary united prayer** as a prerequisite for revival. Other accounts tell of how revivals have come as God has responded to the cries of a handful of people. In the Hebridean revival in the 1950s men and women called upon God, often in desperation on their knees. Sometimes the persistent and faithful prayer of a small group of believers is what God answers; God powerfully touches the lives of individuals and works through them to reach others. This ripple effect of his touch on people's lives can affect whole communities.

Maybe we should consider meeting with others to pray – at church, with others from different churches or simply with one or two friends. We can raise our game!

Nearer ...

Perhaps we want to be more systematic about praying for our neighbourhood. Finding out about the area is an essential first step. You can then respond with faith and action to its needs. Here are some practical suggestions:

- Define the area you want to pray for. It could be your estate, the streets where you live, the city centre, or parish. It may be that there are Christians at your work who want to join you in praying there.
- Approach other churches/networks in the area. Would anyone like to join you?
- Research the area. Find out what activities are taking place in local schools, churches, community centres and play areas. Where do young people gather on the streets? Are there any groups in your community who are overlooked or isolated: older people, young mums, students, asylum seekers, refugees, single adults? Pray for them and see if there are ways of building bridges.
- Ask people: What are the needs? What would they like to see change? In deprived areas, residents often feel that people come and tell them what to do. Yet they are the ones best placed to express the needs of their locality. Consider doing a survey.
- Information can also be obtained from other sources: the council, local library and government websites are a good place to start. The national statistics website (www.statistics.gov.uk) contains census information about health, education, unemployment and crime for every ward in the UK.
- Be prepared to act. For example if there is rubbish constantly being dumped in a play area, God may ask you to lobby the local council, or run parenting classes – or clear it up!

But how can we make time for prayer? See page 20

Sunday

Mmmmm have a break. Time to catch up.

You **can** do this 40 Day journey but you need a short break – so here it is. We've put one day a week just so you can have a break from your 'fast'. It's the Lord's day.

Stop and have a think. How are you getting on? Is there anything that has worked well for you? Is there something that has not worked for you? If so do you want to change what you do next week?

Ideas!

This week has been about God as father:

- What about writing to your father or mother to tell them you are grateful for them or thankful for something they have done for you. It need only be a short note. They will appreciate it. Or if you are a parent, why not write to your children and tell them you think they are great.
- Talk with a friend sometime this week about what's good about fatherhood.

Hebrides 1949-53

In revival, God moves in the district. Suddenly, the community becomes God conscious. The Spirit of God grips men and women in such a way that even work is given up as people give themselves to waiting upon God. In the midst of the Lewis Awakening, the parish minister at Barvas wrote, "The Spirit of the Lord was resting wonderfully on the different townships of the region. His Presence was in the homes of the people, on meadow and moorland, and even on the public roads." This presence of God is

the supreme characteristic of a God-sent revival. Of the hundreds who found Jesus Christ during this time fully seventy-five per cent were saved before they came near a meeting or heard a sermon by myself or any other ministers in the parish. The power of God, the Spirit of God, was moving in operation, and the fear of God gripped the souls of men - this is God-sent revival as distinct from special efforts in the field of evangelism. (Duncan Campbell of the Hebridean revival).

Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.



SEEKING

Word alive

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

Matthew 13:44-46

Imagine finding a treasure chest overflowing with gold coins and precious gems. It is the stuff of fairytales! It's the day – the moment – your life changes forever. From now on you can buy whatever your heart desires, go to anywhere in the world, first class, and lavish wonderful gifts on all your friends.

Fantastic! This is how Jesus describes the kingdom of God: a treasure in a field or a pearl of great price. Nothing is ever the same once we have found this treasure.

The man in Jesus' parable was lucky. He almost stumbled upon the treasure. He knew he had found something more valuable than everything he owned, so he was willing to sell everything to gain this treasure. It was not a financial risk, it was astute. It was the same with the merchant. All he had was less than the value of that one pearl. Selling everything to get the pearl was a bargain.

Why do we seek God? Why do we spend time like this? Why are we willing to pray or to fast? Is it because we think it is just something we should do, a worthwhile process to fine-tune our spiritual lives? If so then we have missed the point. When Jesus speaks about prayer he talks about persistence in asking, knocking and seeking (Luke 11:9-13). That is because there is something to be given, a door to be opened and something to be received. It's not just a process, it achieves something – treasure!

The best thing that we can ever achieve in life is to know God. All that we have pales into insignificance compared to the abundant life he provides for us. He is the greatest treasure this life has to offer. He is worth seeking.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for people in your church or friendship group to experience a breakthrough in their relationship with Christ, finding a deeper appreciation of God in prayer or some greater experience of the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Pray this for yourself too!
- Check your value system! Jesus said, 'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be' (Matthew 6:21) Where is your heart? Worldly goods will never satisfy and they all need to be placed after the pursuit of God..
- Pray for your church that the immense value of the kingdom of God will be seen in the services this Sunday. Pray that people will be drawn to make astute life choices to pursue Christ.
- Pray for our society that the emptiness of materialism will be exposed rather than exalted in the media this week.



Pray for your 'big issue'
Pray for your 'three friends'
Pray for a powerful new wave of God's grace and truth in your community.

Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

Word alive

Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.

Psalm 24:3,4

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

1 John 1:9,10

CLEANSING

Are there things in us which stop God listening to and answering our prayers? Yes! In the Psalms it says “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” (Psalm 66:18). Our sin stops God from answering. So if we want God to hear and answer we must pray with a clean heart.

Perhaps we need to have a ‘clean-out’. Imagine the dirt-busting, clutter-removing team from the BBC visiting a house today? What do they do? They ruthlessly remove unnecessary junk. They organise the muddle and disorder and apply lashings of all kinds of cleaning materials to purge all the dirt and grime. Within hours they can transform a dirty hovel into an attractive, spacious and desirable dwelling.

Now we might not have ‘hovel-like’ proportions of spiritual grime in our lives, but as God is holy, so should we be. How do we get rid of the dust and dirt in our lives? We need to confess where we went wrong – attitudes and actions. How does this work?

God has provided a way of being clean. It is through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. We become clean on the inside not by promising to be good, trying harder or praying more, but by faith in Christ’s death for us. To get a clean heart we need to confess our sins. Confession to God is simply naming our faults, our sins, hiding none holding back nothing. What will God do when we do this? “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness’ (1 John 1:9).

This is how we can be sure that God will listen to our prayer: confess our sin. When we do this, all God’s mighty power is accessible in bringing about the answers we ask of him.



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Word alive

Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

Psalm 63:3

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God— this is your spiritual act of worship.

Romans 12:1

WORSHIPPING

What am I going to get out of it? What’s in it for me? How often we find ourselves subconsciously asking these questions about activities and situations we get involved in!

We all have different ways in which we express our worship, but however we do it we face the same challenge. Too often we are the centre of our attention. But worship is not about us, it’s about bringing something of ourselves to God. We are made in the image of God and our greatest calling in life is to worship our loving creator.

In a conversation recorded in John 4:23,24. Jesus says that God is looking for true worshippers who will worship him in spirit and in truth. Anna worshipped with devotion ‘serving night and day’ in the temple with ‘fasting and prayers’ (Luke 2:37); David danced exuberantly ‘with all his might’ (2 Samuel 6:14); Mary demonstrated extravagant worship as she anointed Jesus with oil (John 12:3).

Worship isn’t just about what we do in church – it is an attitude of serving God at all times and in all we do.. In Mark 12:30 we are called to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. This is radical! It means everything surrendered to him. The apostle Paul picks this up in Romans 12:1 “Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him”. We are to worship him through our lives: our relationships, attitudes and words and actions. Nothing we do should be devoid of worship.

Worship pleases God and allows us to come close to him. The irony is that as we worship without regard for ourselves, we do get something out of it: intimacy with the living God.



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PRAYER POINTS

- Ask God if anything is spoiling your relationship with him. If so, confess it to him.
- Having confessed, thank God for his forgiveness. Christ carried those sins on the cross and God now has no condemnation for you because you are in Christ (Romans 8:1).
- Without being judgmental, pray for the removal of sin barriers in the church.
- Revivals of the past have always included conviction of sin. Pray for God’s Spirit to bring a wave of conviction so that people know they have to get right with God.

PRAYER POINTS

- Still yourself: spend time bringing to God your day, your worries, your concerns. Now spend time worshipping God for who he is: our awesome creator, our Holy Lord, our heavenly father whose love endures forever!
- Pray that in your day’s activities and your relationships you would become less and less concerned with yourself and more and more concerned with what God wants you to be in that situation.

Going further in prayer 2

Deeper...

Withdrawing. We can see from the gospels that prayer was a priority for Jesus. He rose early to pray. He ensured he had time alone with God. He devoted considerable time to praying before making decisions (Mark 1:35). The disciples must have often watched Jesus pray. As the hours slipped by, they became intrigued by his concentration and intimate communion with the Father. Prayer was the breath that Jesus breathed and the driving force of his life.

Later on, it became so with the disciples. 'They all joined together constantly in prayer' (Acts 1:14). 'Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers' (2 Timothy 1:3). Likewise, prayer has always been a primary mark of the saints of God in every generation of the church. John Wesley spent two hours daily in prayer, and commonly said that 'God does nothing but in answer to prayer.' What's important however is not how long we pray, but that when we pray we meet with God.

Prayer is something we can learn to do during the day's activities as well as separate from them. However in our busy lives, we somehow find it difficult to make time for what we know to be the most important activity of all: taking time out with God.

Wider ...

In Psalm 133 we see how precious unity is to God, 'How good and how pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! ... For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life for evermore'. Where there is unity God will bless, but without unity God may not bless fully.

Jesus also prays that his disciples will be sanctified in the truth. Wanting to be united with fellow Christians is not at the expense of truth. But truth motivates us to accept one another, generously minimising non-

essential differences, in order to glorify God with one heart and mouth. Unity does not mean uniformity, but it does mean harmony. With great confidence then, we can pray for believers to be brought to complete unity to let the world know about Christ.

In 1727 a group of persecuted Christians from Moravia addressed issues of disunity among themselves and had a visitation of God. As a consequence they launched a prayer chain that operated around the clock for 100 years and fostered a missionary movement that affected nations. Their special prayer was, 'May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of his suffering.' (see page 57)

It was a united prayer meeting which sparked a new wave of evangelism and the miraculous in the early church also. (Acts 4:29-31). Uniting in prayer is one of the most significant ways that the church can impact the community. It demonstrates tangible unity and glorifies Christ.

Nearer...

There are other things we can do as well.

We can create opportunities for united activity: evangelistic projects, responding to local problems together or supporting other churches' activities.

We can pool our resources to meet the needs of our communities with things like a community shop, relating to the council together, running a café or the 'adopt a cop' scheme.

We may need to recognise and repent of barriers that have been erected in the past or to forgive hurts generated by past difficulties.

Small steps towards creating and expressing our unity may have wide-reaching consequences.

But how can we know what to pray?
See page 33

Word alive

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 1:7,8

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

ENGAGING

The New Testament shows Christianity to be an engaging interacting experience of God's presence and power engaging us in his mission. It speaks about Jesus the Son of God teaching, preaching, doing miracles, healing the sick, raising the dead and rising from the dead himself; about the engagement with forces of good and evil in the spirit world. It is about Jesus sending his Holy Spirit to equip us for his work to reach the ends of the earth with his truth.

A taster of things to come was given to Mary. An angel told her she was going to have a baby even though she was a virgin. Impossible! But the angel told her: "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you," (Luke 1:35). Mary responded with faith and the miracle took place.

This power of the Holy Spirit was hinted at by John the Baptist when he said: "I baptise with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit," (Mark 1:8). Later we see how Jesus returned to Galilee "and the power of the Holy Spirit was with him," (Luke 4:14). It is harder to find a more personal interaction with God's Holy power. In Luke 9:1 Jesus' followers start to receive the power of the Holy Spirit: "He gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases." Throughout the Acts of the Apostles the Church developed and Jesus' followers continue to experience this power and authority.

The challenge for us today is to make Christ known to those around us. We participate in his cause in the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. We can trust him to give us the words to say and for signs and wonders to accompany what we do in his name.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for more of the Holy Spirit's power for yourself and others in your church in ministry and mission, holiness and service.
- Pray that the church will properly engage in the task of making the good news of Jesus known. Pray for church leadership to prioritise this, people who will do it and respond to the message.
- Pray for the 'demonstration of the Spirit's power' as God's word is preached in churches this Sunday, so that people's faith will rest not on human wisdom but on God's power.



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UNITING

Word alive

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

John 17:20-24

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit! Sadly news got around in first century Corinth that some people thought their particular group in the church was more important than others. The purity of Jesus was being invaded by human nature. So in 1 Corinthians 1:10 Paul gets really steamed up, saying in effect: “I appeal to you by the authority of Jesus Christ stop arguing!” He appeals for harmony and an end to silly cliques in the church – or between churches.

What would Jesus say if he heard of Christians taking pot-shots at each other like this? What would he say to people refusing to talk to others – or even crossing the road to prevent a conversation? He would probably tell it like it is: “This is sin!”

Jesus prayed for his followers to be one, just as he and the Father are one. And that is the most wonderful example of unity. He prays to the Father in John 17:22: “I gave them the same glory you gave me, so that they may be one, just as you and I are one” and again in verse 24: “I want them to be with me, where I am, so that they may see my glory, the glory you gave me.”

Jesus says that Christian unity will make a definite impact on the world. Just as Jesus revealed an unseen God to the world, so the Church can reveal the unseen Father and his love. The unity Jesus prayed for is not organisationally produced, nor is it historically invisible. It is something God produces – full of grace and truth. The world needs to see our unity.



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PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for divisions and cliques in and between churches to be removed and for grace and truth to be expressed.
- Pray that we look away from our sinful divisions and bathe in the glory of God, experiencing the love of the Father such that we cannot stop sharing it with others!
- Pray that the watching world will have its visible demonstration of God’s love shown through, and in, the churches here. Pray that many will see this and believe.

ENLISTING

Word alive

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.

1 Peter 2:9-12

It would have been a momentous day. The elderly king David had made great plans for the future and he had enlisted his son to complete them. The plan was to build a temple fit for God. David’s leadership of the nation was being passed to Solomon. So on this special day, when the baton was being handed on, David said to Solomon, “The Lord has chosen you ... Be strong and do the work.” 1 Chronicles 28:9,10.

How did Solomon feel? Did he feel kingly? Did he feel up to the task? Would he have preferred to play football with the lads? We do not know. But he was the anointed child of the king and so he took his place.

On another occasion an elderly leader was writing to those who had become Christians. He wanted them to discover their true identity and fulfil their calling. Peter writes to say they are special, chosen by God in order to fulfil a great plan of telling the night and day difference that God makes (1 Peter 2:9-12.) This was written about us and for us, too.

Do we feel special, chosen by God? Would we rather take a back seat? The truth is, if we have received Christ, we too are children of the king. We also can take our place and live out what we are as Christians. What Peter writes is also for the Church as a whole. It is both our corporate task and our individual opportunity. We are invited to enlist in God’s great cause in the world – with its excitement, challenge and fulfilment.

“The Lord has chosen you ... Be strong and do the work.”

PRAYER POINTS

- Let’s aggressively pray out of our lives the self doubt and false humility that keeps us from taking our place in God’s plan. Pray that you will know more fully the reality of who you are in Christ.
- Pray for your church and the whole Church that a new confidence will arise and that we will together take our place in declaring God’s praise to the world.
- Pray for the Church to do exploits that are audacious, extraordinary, faith-filled and glorifying to God.
- Pray for yourself to have an opportunity to share your faith this week.



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Here's another break. Enjoy this day. Do something you would like.

How about phoning someone who you know is using the 40 Days and asking them how it's going? Encourage each other to keep going.

Have a think. Is God answering any of your prayers?

The week has been about purposes. Is there something you have discovered that you could put into practice?

Ideas!

Do something cheerful:

- Say thank you to the supermarket staff at the checkout or the person who collects up the trolleys.
- Make someone laugh.

New York 1857-1860

In September 1857, a man of prayer, Jeremiah Lanphier, started a businessmen's prayer meeting in the upper room of the Dutch Reformed Church Consistory Building in Manhattan. In response to his advertisement, only six people out of a population of a million showed up. But the following week there were fourteen, and then twenty-three when it was decided to meet everyday for prayer. By late winter they were filling the Dutch Reformed Church, then the Methodist Church on John Street, then Trinity Episcopal Church on Broadway at Wall Street. In February and March of 1858, every church and public hall in down town New York was filled.

Horace Greeley, the famous editor, sent a reporter with horse and buggy racing round the prayer meetings to see how many men were praying. In one hour he could get to only twelve meetings,

but he counted 6,100 men attending. Then a landslide of prayer began, which overflowed to the churches in the evenings. People began to be converted, ten thousand a week in New York City alone. The movement spread throughout New England, the church bells bringing people to prayer at eight in the morning, twelve noon, and six in the evening. The revival raced up the Hudson and down the Mohawk, where the Baptists, for example, had so many people to baptize that they went down to the river, cut a big hole in the ice, and baptized them in the cold water. When Baptists do that they are really on fire!

Taken from *The Role of Prayer in Spiritual Awakening* - J. Edwin Orr



You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our saviour, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the furthest seas.

LIVING IN NEED

Word alive

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:3-12

PRAYER POINTS

- Ask God to meet your own needs as you pursue him as your number one priority.
- Ask God to give you a sensitive heart to look out for the needs of others. Be more willing to help other people than you are to discover how they can help you.
- Listen to what people say (and don't say) to become aware of their real but, sometimes hidden, needs.
- Think: is there something I can do today to make this world a better place. Pray about it.



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God's heart is for the distressed and downtrodden. Jesus, as the Son of God, reveals this. In Matthew 5:1-12 and Luke 4:18-19 he declared his manifesto of bringing good news to the downcast, gladness in place of sorrow and hope for those with a bitter past.

He comes now, to bring God's grace and healing to those whose lives are broken. He brings salvation – restoring our broken relationship with a holy God. It is his rule in our lives that transforms us and spills out into our communities and cities.

All people have a primary and central need for God. Jesus says we are blessed when we hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). If we recognise our need of God and seek him first then we encounter the benefits of his presence. He meets our needs. But if we pursue our needs then the chances are we will not be satisfied. An old saint wisely said, "We should seek the giver not the gift."

However people's needs are real. Their distress often cries out to us. Some have issues crucial to life and others essential to a sense of well-being. Some needs are met by the authorities, whilst others are less readily defined and managed. Human beings need acceptance, significance and a sense of worth, but many limp through life struggling with feelings of failure, rejection and worthlessness. Good friendships and family could make a difference but too frequently are an absent or negative feature.

The Church has a real opportunity as we make it a priority to be available to address people's material needs and showing how our most fundamental needs can be met in God.

LIVING IN POVERTY

Word alive

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment ... he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me ... "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.

Luke 16:19-25.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray about your own attitude to wealth – if you have it or if you don't! Confess any absorbing of the world's value system.
- Trust God with your own finances. Perhaps you need to pray for money, a job, better management of your money. Trust God because he knows your needs before you ask.
- Is there a gift you should make? Pray about your giving to those in need as well as spreading God's Good News in the world.
- Pray for those caught in the trap of debt.

Let's consider the rich. There is enormous wealth in the hands of some. Wealth is not wrong; it is a gift from God. But to be wealthy without generosity is abhorrent to God. It is not His way for those who live in riches to close their hearts to the abject poverty that surrounds them.

The rich man did just this in Luke 16 and he got his 'reward.' When we are rich we can alleviate need by giving out of our wealth. As well as generosity there is often a need for justice. We should be aware of trade issues that keep the poor, poor and the rich, rich. There are injustices to fight.

Let's consider the poor. God hears the cry of the poor and will not forsake them (Isaiah 41:17). When we are poor we can be encouraged knowing that God sees our situation and cares. There is no shame in being poor. Jesus lived dependent on others' generosity (Luke 8:3).

Let's check our attitude. There is a 'poverty spirit'. Do we have the attitude that second best, second hand and second rate is what we are worth? If so, we have not understood how much God values us. This poverty of spirit inhibits us from achieving our full potential. Perhaps we should realise we are children of the king.

And finally, in Revelation 3:14-22 Jesus describes a church that has lost it. They have absorbed the value system of the world and have become luke-warm. They think they are rich and don't need a thing. But Jesus says to them, "You do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." He counsels them to repent, to hear him knocking at the door, receive him and eat with him. Their spiritual poverty was inexcusable.



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LIVING WITH LOSS

Word alive

Mary came to where Jesus was waiting and fell at his feet, saying, “Master, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

When Jesus saw her sobbing and the Jews with her sobbing, a deep anger welled up within him. He said, “Where did you put him?”

“Master, come and see,” they said.

Now Jesus wept.

The Jews said, “Look how deeply he loved him.”

John 11: 32 – 36 (The Message)

“You don’t have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all. Do you believe this?”

John 11:25-26 (The Message)

PRAYER POINTS

- Thank God for blessings in our lives and for strength to cope with difficulties and loss.
- Ask God to show you someone who is suffering and needs your prayers today. Consider praying for this person on a longer term basis.
- Pray for the disabled, ill and bereaved: for comfort, healing and that Jesus would touch their lives – perhaps through a Christian neighbour or friend.
- Ask God to encourage those who care for others in our communities.



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To lose something very dear to us causes great pain. We may lose jobs, health, relationships, hopes, dreams and loved ones.

In John 11 Jesus receives news from two friends of the imminent death of their brother and his friend Lazarus. Despite the emergency, Jesus waits for two days before travelling to visit his dying friend and by the time he arrives Lazarus is long dead. It was hard for his sisters, Mary and Martha, not to ask Jesus why he had not come sooner. The same reproach often rises from our hearts – why Lord? ...If only it could have been different.

Our losses may not always be met with the same powerful miracle as experienced by Lazarus (see John 11:43-44), but we can always take two powerful truths from this account as we pray in the face of loss. First: there is a time for mourning our losses and hurts; Jesus mourns with us during those times. The pain and imperfection of this world hurts and angers him too. Second: ultimately we do not lose. Jesus promises us that even though we may lose our life, we will live – now and in eternity.

God draws close to those who are grieving. Just as we hurt so our cities are hurting places. We can pray that God will be close to us and those around us as we mourn our losses. ‘Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted’ (Matthew 5:4), Jesus said. Jesus’ heart was for those who suffered physically, mentally and emotionally. He demonstrated love and care and healed those who came to him. We too can ask for love and care. And we can ask, right now, in the face of hopeless loss, for his resurrection hope and power.

LIVING UNDER PRESSURE

Word alive

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

Luke 4:18-19

If you hold to my teaching, you will really be my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free... So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

John 8:31,32,36

PRAYER POINTS

- Are there aspects of your life in which you would say you are oppressed? If necessary, ask forgiveness for any wrong choices made. Ask for understanding of the truth and for the Son to set you free. In prayer receive the freedom that Christ wants you to have.
- Are you making the right choices in life? Pray for right thinking and the breaking of any strongholds in your mind that hold you captive (2 Corinthians 10:4,5).
- Pray for those you know who are prisoners to some form of oppression – in mind, body or spirit – that they too will be set free. Include any you know who have an addiction to alcohol or drugs. Pray for those who have become Christians that they will stand firm. Pray for Christians to have the courage to minister to such people.

“Stress is good for you, without it we would not get anything done,” said the stress counsellor. But she went on to say, “Too much stress however is not good for us.” Too much pressure can have debilitating effects.

Much of the pressure we experience is self-inflicted, a result of the choices we make. Our desires to impress, to succeed, to be the first and best underlie lifestyle preferences. Stress inhabits our lives as we place ourselves in the rat race, driven by ambition and busyness. But the Beatitudes indicate a blessedness that God gives those who opt for a meek or humble lifestyle. He values truth over status and purity over power. Choosing to put others first, ourselves last and freeing ourselves from the world’s expectations is an antidote for much of the intense pressure we endure.

Nevertheless, some people experience more than pressure. They are oppressed. This is obvious where there is violence, human trafficking or racism. But there is a less obvious oppression. Illness, depression or life’s circumstances can restrict and constrict innocent lives. The wrong choices that people make, leading to alcohol or drug addiction, bring particularly heinous oppression. Sin in its various forms robs people of their freedom.

Jesus’ stated that he came to ‘proclaim freedom for the prisoners and release for the oppressed’ (Luke 4:18-19). He demonstrated this by forgiving sins, healing sicknesses and driving out demons. He taught that sin leads to slavery. Jesus also taught that truth will set people free. ‘If the Son sets you free then you will be free indeed’ (John 8:36). Through faith in Christ salvation, freedom and healing are possible. He calls us to continue his ministry to people today.



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LIVING IN CONFLICT

Word alive

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 4:29-32

Therefore I am going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor* a door of hope.

Hosea 2:14-15

*Achor means trouble

“It’s going to be uncomfortable. People don’t like to admit it’s there, but violence in the home has got to be flushed out.” Catherine Fitt

Family breakdown is the root of so many of society’s problems. Words and actions cause lasting damage and the anguish of broken or difficult relationships often results in violence. The next generation carries the scars and may continue the same process with their partners. There are not only strained relationships between couples but in all aspects of life. Relationships between colleagues, communities and nations are in tension.

The evidence for modern relationship breakdown points to the need for a return to God’s values. The Bible is clear about how to maintain healthy relationships and restore broken ones. We need to cultivate an attitude of acceptance and service choosing to let love and forgiveness govern our relationships. It is not easy, but we should get rid of negative emotions and attitudes which tear us down. Paul says to get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger and he encourages us to watch what we say, speaking only what is helpful for building people up.

Despite conflict and failure, the Bible emphasises the amazing mercy of God. Restoration is possible as we discover God’s heart. He is a God of fresh starts. First we discover our own identity, secure in Christ. Knowing who we are – sons and daughters of the King of Kings – is the best foundation on which to build a good relationship with a partner or parent, friend or colleague. Then, as we model good relationships and uphold biblical values, we demonstrate Christ-like attitudes: co-operation instead of competition, affirmation instead of criticism, and love instead of hate (Ephesians 4:20-32).

Blessed are the peacemakers.



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LIVING ALONE

Word alive

Practise hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Romans 12:13-16

But he’s already made it plain how to live, what to do, and what God is looking for in men and women. It’s quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour, be compassionate and loyal in your love. And don’t take yourself too seriously – take God seriously.

(Micah 6:8 – The Message)

‘The most daring thing young people can do is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured.’ Kurt Vonnegut.

A third of the population lives alone. 1 in 7 young people is homeless or lives in poor housing. The importance of family and community has declined. Fewer activities revolve around local communities – and if there is a community focal point it is more likely to be a pub than the local church, which was a hub of community life for former generations. People leave home to study or work and find themselves alone – leaving parents alone. Many struggle to find a longed-for life partner. And at the other end of life, an aching void opens when a partner dies.

There is an opportunity for the church. Jesus said, “Do to others what you would have them do for you.” If you were alone, what would you like someone to do for you? Invite you round for a meal? Coffee? Out for a drink? It’s all about taking the initiative. We can make it a priority to include and befriend the lonely and the single by creating inclusive communities. ‘God sets the lonely in families.’ (Psalm 68:5,6) If our father in heaven extends his love to those who are single, widowed and vulnerable, then we can be his hands and feet by taking action.

Of course this also extends to those we might be tempted to shun as different. We all tend to gravitate towards those who are like us. Yet whole people-groups can find themselves rejected or even targets of abuse. God says to treat foreigners as we would treat fellow countrymen, to love them as we love ourselves. (Leviticus 19:33-34) Perhaps the challenge is to demonstrate God’s love even to those who have made wrong choices?

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

PRAYER POINTS

- Ask forgiveness if you have not taken the time to care for your immediate neighbours and those you meet every day.
- Pray that our churches will become places where deep relationships are formed. Pray for those who are single (perhaps that’s you!) that special friendships will be formed.
- Pray for the protection and wellbeing of asylum seekers. Pray that churches will reach out with practical help but also that many come to a real faith in Christ.
- Pray for the gay community and other minority groups – that they will know Christ’s love.



Pray for your ‘big issue’
Pray for your ‘three friends’
Pray for a powerful new wave of God’s grace and truth in your community.

You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our saviour, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the furthest seas.

‘Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.’

Proverbs 31:8,9

Pray for people with serious mental health problems in your local community. Ask God to help those responsible for assessing possible risks to know how best to support the individual compassionately and also ensure public safety. Thank God for those who treat, support and advise people with mental health problems; ranging from mild depression to severe psychotic conditions. Ask him to reveal the most appropriate treatment and advice and lifestyle choices.

Even in this wealthy country poverty causes suffering. Many people live below the breadline. Redundancy and unemployment are a reality for thousands and many have little hope of finding work, struggling with failure, rejection and worthlessness. Pray for the 3.5 million children in Britain who are living in low income households. Ask God to help those who are seeking to help these families overcome related social, health and educational problems.

Pray that God’s kingdom will increase within the neediest areas of our society – in run-down estates, inner cities and other communities, in the areas dominated by criminal activity and where people are living with mental, emotional and spiritual anguish. Pray that Christians who are sharing the gospel in these places may see lives transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pray for the gay community in your area. Ask God to bring them into a place of closeness with him and true freedom in him. Pray also for grace to deal with homophobic attitudes.

VULNERABLE PEOPLE

Give thanks for the rich variety of cultures that God has created and pray that they would bring mutual enrichment to different ethnic groups. Pray for the wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees. Ask God to especially help asylum-seekers and refugees alone in a strange land to find food and shelter, and show the local church how best it can help them rebuild their lives and find Christ. Pray for our legislators that they will frame laws that are just and compassionate.

Pray for those in prison and ask God to meet their social, emotional and physical needs. Pray about the problem of overcrowding in our prisons and ask God to give wisdom to decision-makers in the Home office and Criminal Justice System as they plan future accommodation requirements and ensure that offenders are well treated and rehabilitated. Pray for Christian organisations, prison chaplains, volunteers, visitors who are helping prisoners.

It is easy to condemn prostitutes. But many women work the streets often earning money for dealers or “boyfriends.” They risk their health and their safety. Drug dependency and poverty are underlying causes. Some start young due to peer or family pressure and many cope with bullying or abuse. Children as young as 12 are being sexually exploited. Do we condemn or do we share Jesus attitude to prostitutes? Pray for their protection and for God to give them a way out of dependence and desolation.

Going further in prayer 3

Deeper...

Discovering God’s heart. If our prayers are to be effective we will need to discover what is on God’s agenda. ‘Whatever you ask in my name,’ Jesus said, ‘I will do for you’ (John 14:13). When you pray, you are asking God to do something. But what sort of things do you actually ask him to do? Prayer that is truly in Jesus’ name is prayer that has heaven’s ownership to it. In other words, it is prayer that starts from the heart of God. Matthew Henry said, ‘When God intends great mercy for his people, he sets them a-praying.’

Prayer shouldn’t be about us trying to set God’s agenda. Instead we need to learn to listen to his agenda. What is on God’s heart? What does he want to do in our city or town at this time? When we have understood that, we can then bring those things back to him in prayer. Prayer enables God to carry out his will on the earth. During these days we have an opportunity to listen to God. If our prayers are to be effective we will need to discover what is on God’s agenda.

Listening. Jesus ‘tuned in’ to his Father with unwavering consistency. He knew his Father and his Father knew him (John 10:15). He had singleness of purpose – doing his Father’s will. ‘I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does’ (John 5:19).

It can be difficult for us to get on the right wavelength with God: to ‘tune out’ the busyness, our own agendas and self-centred thoughts as we communicate with the Father. But as we seek him we begin to tune in to our heavenly Father’s voice. As we listen, the Holy Spirit prompts and guides us. We grow to know his voice and hear his directions. Jesus said that his sheep follow him because they know his voice (John 10:4).

When you want to come into God’s presence, find somewhere without distractions and imagine yourself walking into God’s throne room (Hebrews 10:19-23). God rarely speaks to his people through loud or audible words. He is rarely intrusive. More often it is through soft impressions, gentle feelings that come into the minds or hearts of those who are seeking him. Colossians 3:15 says ‘Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts’. The word translated as ‘rule’ (brabeueto) comes from the imagery of the athletics arena and literally means ‘to umpire’. It is the peace of Christ that umpires whether a thought comes from God or not. As things come into your mind, do you sense the peace of God with them? As you spend more time with the Lord, you become better at distinguishing his voice from the other ‘voices’ that come into your head. It’s the same way we recognise the voice of a friend on the telephone.

Listening together. An image from the Second World War is one of the family gathering around the radio tuning in to hear the wartime news. When we gather as part of the Christian family we can listen together. Distracting noises (and people!) need to be quietened for us ‘tune in’ to God’s voice. If we do this together we can come to a place of greater unity and purpose as we discern his direction.

Praying in agreement. Jesus said that ‘if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven’ (Matthew 18:19). This is a powerful promise. It encourages us to pray in agreement with others. Having listened to God and then prayed in agreement we can expect our Father in heaven to answer.

Sunday

Wider ...

Prayer walking has been a powerful spiritual tool in the Christian toolkit for generations. It can provide valuable insight on the spiritual climate of our towns and cities and help fashion how we do mission and ministry. We can see situations about which we pray, 'Your kingdom come, your will be done.' What is it? Put simply it is walking and praying!

Sometimes it is helpful to visualise what you are praying for. Prayer walking enables us to see our neighbourhoods as Christ sees them. When God promised Abraham a son, he took him outside and told him to 'look up at the heavens and count the stars, if indeed you can count them' (Genesis 15:5). Then he said to him 'so shall your offspring be' Seeing the stars stimulated his imagination. Like Abraham we sometimes find it hard to pray for theoretical ideas. But if we go out of our house and walk down the street, we soon bump into real people. We can look into their faces and see their needs. Seeing situations as they are, stimulates us to pray for them to become what they should be. As we walk we can identify with promises given to biblical characters: Abraham was told to walk the land, for 'I am giving it to you'. God told Joshua 'I will give every place where you set your foot as I promised Moses' (Joshua 1:3).

You can walk strategically: plan your walks in advance. Over a period of time, walk down every street in your district and pray for the inhabitants of each house. Linger outside the Town Hall and pray for those in charge of the community. Pray for the businesses and those who work there. Walk past the schools and parks praying for the children, or past the clubs and pubs where the young people meet. You can also walk randomly, asking the Holy Spirit to guide each walk, so that you see the things that he wants you to pray for.

Nearer...

Cleansing for our communities. News of our society falling out of God's plan to prosper and protect us is an everyday event. Yet so often we hear it with hardened hearts. To do otherwise overwhelms us. In the spirit of Nehemiah, we can mourn, fast and pray for 'our people' (Nehemiah 1:4). As we come before God we can pray that our hearts will soften with compassion allowing us to feel the pain of what is happening around us. We can use this pain to pray for change in our community. We share the understanding Nehemiah had of God when he prayed, 'But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.' (Nehemiah 9:17) Therefore we can ask God not to desert our communities.

In today's individualistic society we are not used to confessing anyone's sins but our own. But, 'No man is an island.' We are affected by, and implicated in, the sins of those around us. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus gave the plural confession, 'Forgive us our sins.' We begin to understand the biblical precedent set when Nehemiah, Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5), Daniel (Daniel 9:2f) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 14:20) confessed the sins of their nation.

Are our own attitudes towards other people, God's laws and even God himself not shaped by the society that surrounds us? Confessing the sins of our society in this way moves us from engaging in 'arms length' prayer to praying in a way that is rooted in the knowledge of our belonging to our community. Yet these prayers of confession are prayers with an outward focus: that God would heal us and our land. Praise God that he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins when we confess them.

But what about unanswered prayer?
See page 44

Here's the day off for week three. Stop and take a break. Are you finding this hard? Do you think you can do one more week?

James Corbett, world heavyweight boxing champion in the 1890s, said: "To become a champion, fight one more round."

This last week was all about living in need. Is there anything you would like to do as a result of this week?

Ideas!

Here are a couple suggestions:

- Maybe you have a 'poverty spirit' (see page 27) Then how about doing something nice for yourself and telling yourself you are worth it!
- How about making a special gift to someone just to surprise them. Tell them they are worth it!
- If you are talking with someone who expresses a need about something this week, why not offer to pray with them (or for them). Most people respond positively when someone offers to do this.

Yorkshire 1860

In the 1860s over a million people were added to the church. Here's an example of what was happening in one city: "There were united daily prayer meetings in the port city of Kingston upon Hull, supported by the established church and the dissenting denominations. Numbers of people were unable to gain an entrance to the central meetings, and so, many places of worship were opened each evening for prayer. A monthly united prayer meeting attracted more than 3000. As usual a rising tide of evangelism followed, and campaigns were still crowding halls in

1865 to excess, necessitating the hiring of the circus, at which ministers of different denominations preached. Other very successful campaigns were carried on throughout the year 1865."

Taken from the Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain by J Edwin Orr

HAVING

Word alive

He [Jesus] replied, 'Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. **Nothing will be impossible for you.**

Matthew 17:20

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he listens and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Hebrews 11:6

Do we have faith? Jesus encouraged people's faith. Again and again he said to people that their faith had healed them. He was always looking for that kernel of faith that he could work with and was disappointed when it was not present.

But finding faith is not a process of 'hyping' yourself to believe something that you know to be unlikely. Faith has content. It is faith in something, in someone. And that is what Jesus encouraged people to do – to put their faith in him.

Faith is what is needed for us to see answers to prayer. But this frequently sends us off into a spiral of self analysis: have I got faith? Have I got enough faith? How can I get more? However the most important issue is not how much faith we have, but in whom is it placed?

Our faith must be in God as revealed in Jesus. When we understand what God is like: his nature, his person, his compassion, his word, his love, his eternal, all-encompassing, sovereign power, then we realise we can trust him. A tiny amount of faith – even as small as a mustard seed – when it is in Jesus is sufficient to move mountains.

This week as we pray let's take a long appreciative look at Jesus and put our trust in him for the things we ask.

PRAYER POINTS

- Confess and repent about the mountain of unbelief that pervades our land. Confess your own proneness to scepticism. Have we seen things through eyes of unbelief? Ask for the ability to distinguish between faith and gullibility. Ask that God's Spirit, the spirit of faith (2 Corinthians 4:13) fill your mind.
- Pray about these same things in relation to your church. Pray for the 'ministry' of the church to stimulate faith in a God who can do anything, rather than faith in a God who doesn't do much more than we can do ourselves.



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Pray for your 'three friends'
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You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.

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Word alive

A blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening.

They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, I want to see," he replied.

Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God.

When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

Luke 18:35-43

ASKING

'Simply put, God favours those who ask.' Bruce Wilkinson

Some people are reluctant to ask God for things. However Jesus said, 'You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it.' (John 14:14.) There some things that God will do if we ask that he will not do if we do not ask him.

The blind man in Luke 18:35-43 asked. He was tenacious and single-minded. Piercingly he called out to Jesus - all the louder when the crowd tried to silence him. When Jesus quietened the crowd and asked him what he wanted, the reply was stunningly simple: 'Lord I want to see.' In that one statement lay a life time of dashed hopes and cruel disappointments; of rejection and grinding poverty. He rose above it all in faith that Jesus could heal him. Jesus said, 'Receive your sight, your faith has healed you.'

We are not told how this man knew about Jesus. The crowd referred to Jesus as 'Jesus of Nazareth', but the blind man called him 'Son of David'. He was recognising Jesus as the Messiah. Though blind, he was seeing something. He was single-minded in his request and believed that Jesus was able to do it. He asked - Jesus gave - God was glorified.

In the letter of James a little phrase echoes the same theme: 'You do not have because you do not ask God' (James 4:2.)

We are encouraged to ask God for things. Perhaps we need to overcome our reluctance because, as clear as day, this is a principle in scripture. We must not fail to ask (for whatever reason) when God is waiting for us to do just that.

Jesus said to the blind man, and to us, 'What do you want me to do for you?'



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PRAYER POINTS

- Pray that you – and others in your group or church -will see in Jesus what the blind man saw, that God has power to transform life.
- If Jesus asked you, "What do you want me to do for you?" What would you say? Try telling him now.
- Like the blind man, pray with boldness for things that will make life different for you. Check your motives (James 4:3) and pray with faith and single-mindedness.

ACTING

Word alive

Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralysed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.

Luke 5:18 – 25

'I will show you my faith by what I do.' James had become frustrated with what was going on in some churches. So in radical mood he wrote these words (James 2:18). He was correcting attitudes that said that we don't need to do anything if we are Christians; we don't need to help those in need; we don't need to change our behaviour.

His point was that genuine faith is demonstrated in actions: godly living, care for the poor and consistent behaviour. So for us if we have faith in God then it will determine how we act.

There is another dimension to this. In the Gospels people were told that their faith had healed them. They came to Jesus in various ways but left having had their needs met. Jesus commended them for their faith. How was their faith demonstrated? They showed it by disturbing the peace (Luke 18:35-43), breaking into a house (Luke 5:17-26), nagging (Luke 18:1-8), giving a smart answer (Mark 7:24-30), and grabbing clothes (Mark 5:25-34)! In each case a person had a powerful encounter with Jesus because their faith was demonstrated in their actions. Faith does not lead to passivity. It leads to action.

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. (Heb 11:1) So we need to demonstrate it. There are actions to take consistent with our convictions. There is behaviour to exhibit that shows the reality of our faith in Christ. The absence of action shows we may not have faith. So let us have faith and act.

PRAYER POINTS

- Think about what you can do today that shows you believe what you are praying for, are convinced of ... what you hope for but do not yet see?
- Pray for a person you know who has been 'turned off' by the inconsistencies of Christians' actions or behaviour.
- Pray for your church to be a place where faith is real: demonstrated by obedience and love in action.
- Pray for God to do miracles.



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TESTING

Word alive

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead and, figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

Hebrews 11:17-19

You may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Peter 1:6-7

Abraham is called the "father of faith" for good reason. Called by God to leave his homeland and his family, in effect everything from which he derived his identity and security, Abraham agreed to travel to a land he knew nothing about. It was a hard test, one that his father, Terah, had failed, preferring to stop in Haran, but Abraham took up the call and moved out.

Once in the land God promised him a son, but as the years went by Sarah's barrenness almost consumed hope. However, God kept his word and in time she gave birth to Isaac. The son of promise had arrived. But what of God's next command "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering.." What was Abraham to do with that? But early the next day Abraham is ready to obey..... He had learnt to trust God.

Testing strengthens our faith, "the testing of your faith develops perseverance...so that you may be mature and complete." It can hit us in many personal ways such as sudden illness, financial difficulties, childlessness, bereavement, broken relationships or the seeming silence of God in times of desperate prayer. The testings seem to defy God's love and faithfulness, yet we are called to believe the truth in the face of adverse circumstances.

Hold on! For God is faithful and "blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him (James 1:12)... We consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. (James 5:11)

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for anyone you know who is going through a hard time. Pray that their faith will not fail.
- Pray for any young people who are causing anxiety to their parents: "Pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children" (Lamentations 2:19).
- Pray for the parents, too.



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SEEING

Word alive

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Ephesians 1:18

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:18

Joseph's boy or the Son of God; deceiver or truth itself; a bloody corpse on a cross or the Son of God coming into his Kingdom; blasphemer or King of the Jews? It's the same man through different eyes.

'Blind Pharisees!' said Jesus to those who looked at him but didn't 'see' him. Paul, the Pharisee of Pharisees, was blinded before he truly 'saw' who Jesus was. In his letter to the Ephesians he prays 'that the eyes of your heart may be opened' to bring understanding, for it is not with our natural eyes that we see Jesus or his Kingdom, but with our spiritual eyes.

These are the eyes of faith, the eyes that see what is unseen. When we see with faith, that unseen world becomes more real than the physical world we live in. However, the hard realities of life can crowd out faith bringing in doubt, despair and unbelief if we are not careful.

'Only believe!' says Jesus. Trust what the eyes of faith show you. What do you see with the eyes of the heart? Jesus called himself 'the truth' and another word for truth is 'reality'. Our unseen Lord is more real than any situation here on earth. Be encouraged today to believe again.

Perhaps you have given up on a promise from God or felt that the struggle of faith was too much for you? Then look up, use the eyes of faith to see Jesus, and believe again. Don't be robbed by the enemy of your soul who wants you to believe that the problem is too big – that Jesus offers only a vain hope. Fix your eyes on him and faith will rise again.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray that the eyes of our hearts will be enlightened so that we can know the hope to which God has called us.
- Let's pray that, like Paul, we can say that though we are outwardly wasting away, inwardly we are being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16).
- Pray for those in the last days of their lives, that they will come to 'see' Jesus, even if they have rejected him until now, there is still time.



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Word alive

Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.

Luke 1:45

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing — if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? Consider Abraham: He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Galatians 3:1-6

RECEIVING

It would be quite comical. Imagine someone at a cash machine putting in their card then, instead of keying in details, getting down on their knees and pleading with the machine to give them money. It would even more so, if their pleadings included that their need was great, their family was depending on it and if they didn't get the money, then quite frankly, they wouldn't know what to do.

Now when it comes to making our requests to God we often miss the point: we will receive what we ask for by faith. God has promised to give us what we need, so. So we can trust him to fulfil his promise. We can therefore approach God with confidence not diffidence (Hebrews 4:16).

The Galatian Christians got this idea right at first. However they slipped back into human effort and missed faith. Paul chides them, 'After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? ... Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?'

God gives promises. He may test us, and in so doing cause us to grow. We may have to wait, and in so doing learn patience. But there comes a time of fulfilment, when what has been promised is given, what has been longed for is received and what has been hoped for is accomplished.

It is simple. We receive what we ask for because of faith, not human effort.

As it is promised so shall it be.

PRAYER POINTS

- Check that you have not slipped into thinking that your prayers are going to be answered by human effort. Ask God to realign your praying into faith. Of the things you have been praying about what do you have faith that God will do?
- What do you need: filling with the Holy Spirit, a closer walk with God, patience, etc? Ask and receive.
- Pray for your church that its ministry will be one of faith rather than human effort.



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FEAR OR FAITH

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

1 John 4:17-19

The new age movement involves those who are seeking their own spiritual path and experiences with the spiritual or supernatural world. For many new-agers, their beliefs are a fusion of alternative healing, natural magic, and meditation. Many engage in tarot card reading, Ouija boards, astrology, crystals, fortune telling, spiritualism, spiritual healing, and white witchcraft (Wicca). Pray for those who are drawn into such practices, often through looking for answers for themselves, that they would come to know the truth.

Domestic violence is a significant issue taking place behind closed doors. Many women (and some men) find themselves suffering at the hands of their partner and are subjected to physical, sexual, psychological or emotional abuse. People are often trapped due to economic or emotional dependency. Children are abused and do not know how to ask for help. Others are simply neglected. Pray for people in domestic conflict in your area.

Pray for those in Islam and other religions that they will know the truth and be set free. Pray that the increasing anger and antagonism many Muslims feel towards the West would be dispelled. Ask God to restrain hard-line activists whose long-term aim is Islam to become prominent in our nation.

Pray that traditional Christian values which are a part of our heritage will not be further eroded by an increasing wave of secularisation. Pray for national to be strengthened and where necessary changed in accordance with biblical values.

Ask God to restrain anyone involved in terrorist activities or any form of oppression and torture.

Pray for those trapped in cults or caught up in secret societies. Ask God to reveal the truth and open up a way out for them

The streets are a dangerous place for many. Racism, antisocial behaviour, drunkenness and violence make people feel unsafe and fearful of leaving their houses. Let's care for individuals we know, take our own stand to bring light into dark places and pray for societal change

Pray for Christians living in countries where they are persecuted for their faith.

Going further in prayer 4

Deeper...

Unanswered prayer. What happens when prayer isn't instantly answered? Did we pray the wrong thing? Sometimes we do, but often we need to keep on praying. Sometimes it needs more time and pressure to squeeze our circumstance into the new mould of God's word!

Remember Elijah (1 Kings 18:41 – 45). He spoke God's word into a situation of chronic drought ('there's the sound of heavy rain'). Then he started to pray that God's word would be fulfilled. When nothing happened, he continued to pray. He kept looking to see if the promised change had arrived yet! As Elijah kept on praying, pushing in the Spirit, crying out in faith for God to fulfil his word, God was beginning to draw water vapour into a cloud far out at sea. Eventually, it was seen and finally it started to rain. The word that God had given had come to pass. Elijah had prayed it into being!

Jesus told the parable of the persistent widow who kept up the pressure on an unjust judge. The judge eventually granted the request. His story was specifically told to encourage people always to pray and not to give up (Luke 18:1-8). How do we do this?

Wrestling. There's a picture in Colossians 4:12 of Epaphras. 'He's always wrestling in prayer for you', wrote Paul. It's easy to imagine this saint, eyes shut in earnest concentration, taking hold of a subject in prayer, and attacking it from every angle, mentally rolling it over and over until he sensed that he had won the victory. Sometimes we need to see prayer as a fight!

Training. Which athlete can win a race without training? Every morning he gets up early and runs a course that he has mapped out. His daily routine is ordered with this goal

in mind. As he exercises his muscles he finds that they are getting stronger. He has more power and tires less easily. We can adopt a similar approach with prayer. We hold ourselves to a certain amount of time, keep on praying, resisting the temptation to go and do something else!

Persevering. A woman came to Jesus (Matthew 15:22-28) and asked for help for her demon possessed daughter. It seemed he wasn't interested because he didn't answer her. She persisted. His disciples told her to go away. She persisted. Jesus explained that he was too busy looking after the needs of the Jews. She persisted. He said that the food for the children must come first before others. She persisted and found the courage and quick wit to come up with a smart answer, 'Even the dogs get the crumbs from the children's table.' Jesus said she had great faith. Her request was granted; her daughter was healed.

It was his intention to heal all along, but he needed her to get to the point of not accepting 'no' for an answer. Silence from heaven, being cold-shouldered by Christians, even a theological perspective that says these things don't happen today are all used to discourage us. They didn't deter the woman who would not accept no, and they shouldn't deter us either.

We need not accept the status quo concerning life where it is contrary to the will of God. There is too much at stake and we must persist until we see change

Wider...

Widening our perspective. Sometimes our praying can revolve around our own circumstances and contacts. Most of us live in villages, towns or cities. These places where we live have significance, character and identity. They are full of people who we

may not know, but together we make up our community's distinct character. Cities and other places are the subject of prayers in the Bible. We can begin to pray in such a way that the entire atmosphere, infrastructure and corporate activities can be transformed. Let's extend our praying and ask God to be at work in new places; let's stand together in prayer for our cities, towns and villages. And as we look further afield, we can also consider interceding for our nation.

Nearer...

Obstacles to faith. Whilst people's minds are blinded by the god of this age, primarily through sin and unbelief, there are also other obstacles. Cities and towns, like people, have characteristics – certain things that contribute to a common identity. Jesus spoke of whole towns on occasion describing their collective attitude to him (Matthew 23:37, Luke 10:13-15). In his travels Paul noticed how local mindsets affected how the gospel was received (Acts 17:11,16,21).

Through a town's history, character gradually evolves, being shaped by people and key events. In some places there is more opposition to the gospel than in others. The cultural mindset clearly affects things. As we identify some local character traits or mindsets that could be obstacles to the gospel e.g. apathy, complacency, or superiority these can help us to pray for change. God can change people's character, even the character of a whole area.

But how can we have greater authority in prayer? See page 55

Sunday

RESTORING

Four weeks completed already. You deserve a day off. And you can catch up on anything missed, if you want to.

See how far you have come! OK. Maybe you have missed a day or two but you are still travelling on this journey. You can feel good about that.

Faith was the topic this week.

Was there anything new for you? Is there something for which you are beginning to believe God?

Ideas!

Do something that expresses your faith or something that challenges your faith:

- Go outside and look up at the stars or watch a sunset and say, aloud, 'Lord and King, you have reached out your great and powerful arm. You have made the heavens and the earth. Nothing is too hard for you.' (Jeremiah said this when he was overwhelmed with all that God could do. Jeremiah 32:17)
- Talk to someone you don't normally talk to.

Wales 1904

The Welsh Revival started in 1904. It began as a movement of prayer. A key figure was a former coal miner, Evan Roberts, who was studying at Newcastle Emlyn College. He attended a campaign held by Seth Joshua, a Presbyterian evangelist, who prayed at the meeting, 'O God, bend us.' Roberts had responded with 'O God, bend me.' Following this he kept hearing a voice that told him to go home and speak to the young people in his home church. On his return to Loughor, his home town, his reluctant pastor allowed him to speak only at the end of a prayer meeting.

Roberts told them
'I have a message for you from God:

You must confess any known sin to God and put right any wrong done to others.

Second, you must put away any doubtful habit.

Third, you must obey the Spirit promptly.

Finally, you must confess your faith in Christ publicly.'

The response to his message was remarkable and following a series of meetings a break occurred and the movement spread rapidly over Wales: in five months a hundred thousand people were converted throughout the country. The revival had a widespread social impact.



RENEWING OUR CONFIDENCE

Word alive

Moses said to the LORD, 'O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.' The LORD said to him, 'Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.' But Moses said, 'O Lord, please send someone else to do it.'

Exodus 4:10-13

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:13

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

Acts 4:29, 30

It is distressing how events rob us of our confidence: a harsh word of discouragement; a complaint from a team member; a father who never encouraged; a mother who controls.

Little wonder that so many of us struggle to have any confidence to do anything worthwhile. As life takes its toll, we become dispirited. Eventually we become so lacking in confidence that we don't need the discouragement of others to stop us from acting, we do it to ourselves. We believe we are useless.

But this is a lie. God gives encouragement (Romans 15:5). He speaks to downcast people of a former generation saying, 'Arise and shine for your light has come' (Isaiah 60:1). He brings those who receive Christ into his family as his children (John 1:12) and he banishes the darkness of despair and discouragement with the light of his presence. We are made in his image and according to his purpose. So there are good grounds for renewing our confidence.

Paul encourages Timothy to overcome his natural reticence when he said that God has not given a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, love and self discipline. He encourages him to fan into flames the gift that God has given him (2 Timothy 1:6,7). Timothy was being encouraged to believe that God had given him something other than his natural timidity. We also have the same spirit of power, love and self discipline which we received when we received Christ into our lives.

Have you lost confidence? Has life eroded your assurance? If so, let's address the root causes and apply the solution: a fresh realisation that you are a child of a God who is 100% committed to you, giving you power, love and self discipline.



Pray for your 'big issue'
Pray for your 'three friends'
Pray for a powerful new wave of God's grace and truth in your community.

'Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit' says the Lord Almighty.

TURNING THE TIDE

'Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?"'
Romans 15:1,2 (the message)

Nearly 80,000 people in the UK live with HIV. About 22,000 have developed aids. Thank God that He knows and cares for every single individual affected by HIV/AIDS – many of them victims of other people's carelessness. Ask Him to give them hope and peace in their suffering and to provide appropriate help and support. Ask God to draw near to the thousands of aids orphans, especially in Africa.

At least 700,000 people are trafficked worldwide each year. Through deception, coercion and the threat or use of violence they are forced into slavery. Ask God to bring them into freedom. Thank God for organisations which work together to raise awareness of the practice of human trafficking – particularly women and children into sexual slavery. Ask him to give them wisdom and favour and that he will guide those who seek to help these people in practical ways.

Thank God for those who worked for the Abolition of the Slave Trade two centuries ago. Give thanks for abolitionists such as Wilberforce and ask God to help us similarly fight wholeheartedly and with perseverance to eradicate the evil of today's slave trade. Pray that captives may be set free.

Pray for British servicemen and women and others who are working towards bringing peace and security to the people of Iraq, Afghanistan and other places throughout the world.

Thank God for the beauty of this planet. Ask God to forgive us for the ways in which we have not been faithful stewards of the earth. Ask for help for each one to take more personal responsibility for our environment and protect it. Pray that he would show us how to take effective measures to address environmental problems nationally and locally and in our own lives. Pray for those monitoring both immediate and long-term effects of climate change, damage to the ozone layer, pollution and industrial and chemical emissions. Ask for strategies and the political will to implement ways to reverse dangerous trends.

For further ideas on praying for your area see insert on centre pages

Word alive

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms

Ephesians 6:12

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

James 4:7-8

PRAYER POINTS

- Ask God whether you have unwittingly been a tool in the hands of the enemy: by accusing falsely, by spreading gossip, by bringing damage to others' lives. Confess this and, if need be, go and make peace.
- Break a stronghold in your mind! Bring a despairing mind set to God who transforms and brings hope!
- Resist the devil in regard to areas of your life or your church that have been in conflict. Take your stand against him clothed with the armour of God.
- Pray about an issue in our nation where Satan has been seeking to gain a foothold by stealing, killing and destroying (John 10:10).

RESISTING OPPOSITION

We pray 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...' but often we experience conflict that stems from people's opposition to God. It occurs in several arenas. Many Christians have found conflict in places that they considered to be the most secure: at church, home, even family or friendships... places they believed to be outside the battle-zone. Not so!

It is in the unseen world where our real enemy lies. Though defeated at the cross, Satan still prowls around accusing, deceiving and leading the world astray. He will try to damage wherever he can, so we need to be alert. James 4:7 doesn't say, 'Ignore the evil one and he will flee from you', but 'Resist the devil and he will flee from you'.

The Bible is full of encouragement for us as we resist opposition. Joshua, when facing an impregnable city, used the strategy God gave him and became a history-maker at Jericho. David stood against an enormous giant with a simple sling and confidence in God. Daniel would not compromise his faith and paid for it by spending a night with the lions. He showed us that God can shut both the mouths of lions and the mouths of those who falsely accuse.

But perhaps the greatest arena of spiritual warfare occurs in our heads: the space between our ears! In 2 Corinthians 10:4,5 Paul talks about strongholds. A stronghold is an 'attitude or mindset, impregnated with despair that accepts as unchangeable anything that is contrary to the will of God.' Such strongholds are situated in our reasoning, our knowledge and our thoughts. With God there is no difference between an impregnable city and a wounded mind. That is why Paul encourages us to, 'Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.'

Perhaps here, if nowhere else, we should pray, 'Deliver us from evil.'



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REMOVING PREJUDICE

Word alive

You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection... I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

Acts 10:28-35

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Romans 15:5-7

PRAYER POINTS

- Confess any cultural prejudices that you might have: to immigrants, the rich, the poor, the unemployed, different races. Pray for Christ-likeness.
- Confess any spiritual prejudices you have towards other churches or denominations. Pray that you will grow to see them as God sees them.
- Pray that God would help people in your church to be less critical of others, but instead 'quick to listen and slow to speak'.
- We need maturity in knowing how to handle doctrinal differences. Pray for a greater understanding of God's truth in his word.

What is our reaction when we think about people who are charismatic, reformed, evangelical, catholic, immigrant, foreign? People are different and that can fuel prejudice determining whether we trust or mistrust, accept or reject.

It's easy to see how much Jesus' disciples were influenced by prejudice. They had spent three years watching as he ate with tax collectors, befriended prostitutes and became a friend of sinners, but still they carried their culturally elitist, Jewish mindset into the post-resurrection world.

Cornelius, a gentile, was the last person on earth to whom Peter would take the gospel. It took an angelic visitation, a heavenly vision and supernatural guidance to convince Peter he should preach to Cornelius' household. He had to overcome his prejudices.

Christians often justify our prejudices against Christians of other denominations on doctrinal grounds. We assess others' beliefs and this becomes the wall that separates us from them. We think 'they' have got it wrong and that we have to be careful about associating with 'them'. With others we put them in boxes marked 'very spiritual', 'spiritually unbalanced', 'doctrinally suspect', or 'needs prayer'! We would do well to listen to what God told Peter in that vision which led him to Cornelius, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean' (Acts 10:15, Acts 11:9).

Jesus loved and associated with those who belonged to spiritual institutions he knew to be flawed – remember Nicodemus (John 3) and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). And do you think the church of today would have shown such acceptance to the woman caught in adultery? To Jesus, she was a child of God, an individual, though sinful, to whom he could reach out. He treated her with respect, and with a complete lack of prejudice: 'Let him who is without sin throw the first stone' (John 8:7).



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REFLECTING LIKENESS

Word alive

Whenever anyone turns to the Lord the veil is taken away... and we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:16-18

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

2 Corinthians 5:20

Since the Fall, mankind has made countless of erroneous attempts to know God. We have worshipped everything from the sun, moon and stars to rocks, snakes, owls, bulls, lizards, celebrities, grotesque carved images and lumps of wood.

However, when God wanted to reveal himself, he sent Jesus, the exact representation of his being. Jesus wasn't just pretty close to what God is like, or the best available thing, he was and IS God. Everything God is, Christ is.

Christ was God's ambassador, coming into the world to reconcile people to God. Now that same ministry of reconciliation has been give to us, and just as Jesus reflected God, so we are to reflect Christ and be his representatives on earth. What ME? HOW?

How did Moses radiate God's glory? He spent time in God's presence, so much so that his face shone. When we gaze on Christ with unveiled faces we reflect Jesus back into the world. The dark, lifeless moon has no light of its own, but reflects the powerful light of the sun. Yet that comparison falls short, for we are actually being changed into the likeness of Christ. The moon will never become a ball of fire, but we will become just like him. He calls us brothers and sisters.

Spend time with God as Moses did, speaking to him face to face as you speak with a friend. Then when you go out into the world hold your head up believing that you do indeed reflect the glory of Christ on your face, and in your transformed character.

PRAYER POINTS

- Spend time with God today: as a servant with his master, as a child with its father as a wife with her husband. Be still in his presence.
- Pray for your church this Sunday for many in the congregation to know the presence of God in a new way.
- Pray that as individuals and as churches we would reflect the TRUE nature of Christ to the world.



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RECOVERING INITIATIVE

Word alive

The greatest mistake we can make in life is to be continually fearing we will make one.

The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.'
'Ah, Sovereign Lord,' I said, 'I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.'

But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,' declares the Lord.

Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, 'Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.'

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Many of us want to step forward and serve God. But perhaps we have tried things in the past which didn't work out so we. We don't want to make ourselves vulnerable again. There are real challenges in making ourselves available to God: dealing with fears and facing up to responsibilities. However the great gain is that we get close to God himself and live a life of enterprise and purpose.

The Bible is packed full of ordinary people who took simple steps of obedience to God. Jeremiah responded to God's call by saying that he didn't have what was needed. Nevertheless God encouraged him and Jeremiah made his life available to God. His faith and courage had the edge over his doubt and fear. To recover our initiative we need to look honestly at our doubts and fears and ask God to strengthen our faith and courage. If we take one step, we may find that other steps come more easily. Faith can be nurtured and cultivated.

Sydney Smith, an old saint, wrote: 'A great deal of talent is lost to the world for want of a little courage. Every day sends to their graves obscure men whose timidity prevented them from making a first effort.' When we recover our availability and initiative we share in the excitement of being part of a movement spanning culture, history and continents. We will have the fulfilment of getting to the end of our life having done what we were put here to do.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for faith and courage today to take the initiative in: a conversation, a project, a deed of kindness, praying for someone, sharing your faith.
- Pray that those within the church who disguise unbelief as 'caution' would be helped to trust God and that wisdom would lead to godly activities.
- Pray that the church would become characterised by faith and courage which enable it to engage in great exploits that glorify God.



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RESTORING ORDER

Word alive

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

1 John 3:2

And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

1 Corinthians 15:49

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Romans 8:29

In fairy tales, a frog becomes a prince, a puppet becomes a real boy, and a scullery maid becomes a princess. But in the real world God is working towards a whole new creation. And when God restores he does not come with his mending kit to stick the old, broken self back together again. He comes with his creative transforming power to make us altogether new.

We are new creatures: the old has gone and the new has come. God is not just restoring us to what we should have been if we had lived a good life from the day of our birth. He is making us like Jesus.

But when we look in the mirror the old familiar face stares back at us. When we stumble into sin we are acutely aware that the old has not yet gone. At this time we have the deposit of the Holy Spirit, the guarantee of what is to come. A deposit is given when the purchase is fully decided, but it speaks of a day of completion still to come. The apostle John says NOW we are children of God, but what we will be has not yet been made known. There is a NOW and a THEN.

Paul talks of the whole of creation groaning, as we do, longing for the liberation from the old into the new. Today we catch glimpses of love, joy, peace and kindness; we taste the powers of the age to come, but that perception can be quickly snatched away by life's uncertainties. However a day will come when God will restore it all, when the Kingdom will come in all its fullness and everything that causes sin, pain and heartache will be gone, forever.



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Going further in prayer 5

Deeper...

Having greater power in prayer comes from laying hold of God's word and praying with authority.

Praying God's word. There is great power in God's word and we should use it. The Bible is full of promises. Paul tells us all God's promises are 'yes' in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). They can be ours, if we claim them. Imagine winning the lottery and not bothering to check your ticket to see if you had won the prize! Or throwing away the ticket because you didn't believe that the lottery company would keep their promise to pay! But that's how we often treat God's promises.

We should diligently seek out every promise that is available for us, and then by faith, lay hold of them in prayer. We can be inspired by those who, 'Through faith... gained what was promised' (Hebrews 11:33). Jesus taught us to pray, 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10). As God's word expresses his will, so we can ask him to fulfil his word on earth.

We can pray with greater authority as we believe what God has said.

Praying with authority. Satan's greatest fear is that the Church might realise that she is more powerful than he is! Like Pharaoh, the devil is afraid that the Church might leave the land of captivity. When the Church begins to proclaim the truth of the word and to put it into practice, and is able to pray with authority, she is destined to overcome. Like the Israelites in Egypt, we have God's promises. In addition, we are, 'seated in heavenly places with Christ' (Ephesians 2:6) but over time, we forget some of these truths, and find ourselves enslaved again. Our tendency is to invent reasons that explain our

spiritual misery and our inactivity. Often we stop saying those prayers that could only be answered through a miracle, or we form our prayers in such a way as to give God 'a way out', in case no answer comes. But it is the truth that sets us free, so the truth must be proclaimed.

In Egypt, the children of Israel cried out to God and they were heard. Praying was all they could do. Moses came and spoke with authority to Pharaoh declaring the truth of the Israelites' destiny. They would be freed because God was going to do it (Exodus 3:7-10). What God says is true, is true. It should be believed and can be proclaimed. This is how we can pray with authority. It was the same for the early Church. Their prayer was dynamic and powerful. God gives us 'the power to walk on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy' (Luke 10:19). 'You, little children, you are of God, and you have the victory over them, because he that is in you is greater than he that is in the world' (1 John 4:4). God has given us authority over the enemy; it is up to us to use it.

Wider...

Taking responsibility for the place where we live. To reach a whole town or city people are needed who are ready to bring it to God. A few key people who commit themselves to prayer can make the difference. In Genesis 18:16-33, God showed Abraham two cities which were about to be destroyed – Sodom and Gomorrah. The outcry of destructive pride and sexual malpractice brought about by the sin of people in those cities was causing immense grief. God invited Abraham to pray. Abraham interceded for the lives of the righteous in these cities. His intercession brought about the remarkable escape of one family.

PRAYER POINTS

- Take time today to rejoice in what God has done for us. Our future is stunning, awesome, more amazing than we could ever ask or imagine. Thank God for this.
- Pray for those who are suffering: physically or emotionally.
- Pray for those who are being persecuted. Pray that God will give strong glimpses of heaven and the new order of things.
- Pray for those who are facing death that they will do so without fear, joyfully anticipating their own resurrection.
- Pray for those who have lost heart, that God would restore hope.

Sunday

Jonah, after a little diversion with a big fish, preached to Nineveh (Jonah 3). This was a city teeming with 120,000 people. But it was facing catastrophe. His ministry brought about repentance which averted the destruction. God had concern for the people in that city and he wanted to show is compassion.

Has God invited you to pray for your town or city? Some people are particularly called to take responsibility like this. Eternity will tell the significance of such praying. To reach a whole town or city also needs evangelism. A few key people are needed who are ready to make Christ an issue. When Paul arrived in Ephesus it took only two years for everyone in the whole region to hear the word of the Lord (Acts 19:10).

Nearer...

Rebuilding our walls. The walls and gates of a city are biblically and traditionally significant. The walls are an important part of the defence of a city. The gates were a means of trade through which the city was served on a day to day basis. They were also a means by which the city could get rid of its waste. Gate-keepers were appointed to look out for opposition and keep the gates closed from dusk to dawn.

When we '(re)build the walls of the community' we do so to protect it and strengthen it against attack, so that it can be a place of God's presence, a place of praise, unity and peace. Intercessors often build spiritual 'walls' and some view themselves as gatekeepers. They keep spiritually alert to assess and marshal the spiritual activities of their cities. Researching the influences sociologically, historically and spiritually as well as prayer walking can give insight about the current spiritual state of an area.

Restoring community relationships. The gap between the rich and the poor in the UK is the largest it has been for 40 years. A recent

report showed that people's lives are still largely determined by parents' social class and skin colour. National statistics tell us that attainment at school, participation in further or higher education, and even life expectancy are strongly influenced by people's social and economic background. Certain specific social injustices are evident in all communities.

Injustice, wherever it occurs, needs prayer. It needs to be exposed and it needs to stop. Pray for good relationships between groups of people in your area. Identify a tension in your local community (between racial groups, old and young people, different neighbourhoods). Visualise the relationship as God would want it – hurts healed, distrust removed, injustice righted, and respect restored. Ask God to intervene and pray the image into reality.

But isn't doing things more important than praying? See page 59

Week five. You have now covered a lot of ground on this journey.

How are the times with God going?

"It's not the dramatic answers to prayer, but the quiet awareness of doing something I always meant to do with God" (from a previous 40 Day pray-er.)

This was all about 'restoring.' How has this affected you? Is there one thing that stands out?

Ideas!

Restoring initiative was a topic this week. Here are some suggestions:

- Have a conversation with someone who is different from you – older, younger. Do something out of the ordinary for a person you know – make a drink for them, plant some bulbs in pots and distribute them, tidy someone's garden or even your own!
- Go You could clean something up. Leave the room, toilet, hall, street, etc. tidier than when you went in to it.

Saxony 1727

The Moravians officially established their community in 1457. Yet for 250 years, they had suffered intense persecution for their beliefs until 1722 when Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a man of deep faith, invited them to refuge on his estate. These asylum seekers came from Czechoslovakia and Bohemia to a village called Herrnhut in Saxony. Zinzendorf, the de facto leader of this group, was disturbed by the tension and had been praying with key community leaders about it.

Prayer started in August and on August 13, 1727 the whole community assembled for a communion service, and in that service, the entire body felt the presence of the Holy Spirit, leading them to beg forgiveness of one another and weep and seek reconciliation. Something happened to the Moravians during that service – they were transformed from being a disparate bunch of refugees into an excited band

of disciples, ready for any task. Count Zinzendorf looked upon that day as "a day of the outpourings of the Holy Spirit upon the congregation; it was its Pentecost."

Within two weeks, twenty-four men and twenty-four women of the community covenanted together to spend one hour each day, day and night, in prayer to God for His blessing on the congregation and its witness. For over 100 years, members of the Moravian church continued non-stop in this "Hourly Intercession." Like the first Pentecost, men and women would move forth with the gospel from Herrnhut to the uttermost parts of the earth. All Moravian adventures were begun, surrounded, and consummated in prayer. They became known as "God's Happy People," establishing missions and churches around the world and having a key role in the life of John Wesley among others.

GRACE

In your majesty ride forth victoriously on behalf of truth, humility and righteousness; let your right hand display awesome deeds.



Going further in prayer 6

Deeper...

Being still. People value activity over rest. Many of us are never happy unless we are doing something. Life can be a whirlwind of both physical and mental activity as we rush from one thing to the next. Our thoughts never really centre on one thing.

Jesus speaks through the story of Mary and Martha to urge us to slow down. Mary quietly sat and listened at his feet whilst Martha scurried around visible and active yet missing out on hearing his words and enjoying his friendship. Mary wasn't wasting time but developing a deep love and understanding. Jesus said she had chosen the better way. Is inactivity a waste of time or an investment towards depth and fullness of life?

The psalmist knew the importance of stillness before God. He knew how refreshing it is to 'lie down in green pastures'. Jesus said 'Come to me, ... and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28). We can learn just to be with him. We can be like a sponge soaking in his presence. When our time with him is focussed, he reaches the depths of our hearts and minds. We reach deeper understanding and tap into his resources for living. Our souls are nourished.

Wider...

Another area for prayer is praying for the lost. When we pray for the lost we are tapping in to something that is on God's heart. Jesus told three parables in Luke 15 each of which show God's concern for the lost.

If your only child was dying, you'd pray like you'd never prayed before. And you'd do all that you could to bring about a change in his condition. If we understood the pain that is in God's heart as he watches the spiritual death in our land, we would give ourselves to prayer much more fully. God wants all men to be saved. Behind the process of reaching the

population with the message of Jesus, lies the bedrock of God's love – which reaches to all people. Christ has suffered for all and we want him to receive his reward. Praying that all should hear is in accordance with God's will, who desires that none should perish (2 Peter 3:9).

Nearer...

As well as praying for the lost we should also pray for the place where we live. 'Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers you too will prosper' (Jeremiah 29:7).

We can be thankful for many instances of God's 'gracious hand' at work: the provision for local projects; individuals within our church and community who faithfully and courageously work; even the opportunity of prayer together during these days. These are all God's blessings to us for which we can be thankful.

We should seek peace for our communities. Specifically we can pray for reduction of crime in problem areas, for our police, for the causes of crime and for those who commit crime.

We should also seek prosperity. We can pray for wisdom, rather than folly, to permeate decision-making, innovation, and provision in each of these areas: arts and media, sport and leisure, manufacturing, business and commerce, education, health and social welfare and the environment.

Pray words of blessing into each of these spheres. Thank God for the ways you have seen improvement. Thank him for new developments, new initiatives and ventures that are having a positive impact in your area.

For more ideas on how to pray into these areas see the centre pages.

But how can I live in God's presence?
See page 75

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

Ephesians 1:4-5

Children: Pray for the millions of children in our world who have no rights. Ask him to protect the unborn who are vulnerable to abortion. Pray for those enslaved in child labour and those growing up in extreme poverty or in the midst of conflict. Pray for the children in your area. Ask God to let them know the reality of his presence.

Women: Pray for girls to find positive role models who are able to show them how to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. Pray for those at risk. Ask him to address the recent trend among young women of binge drinking which exposes them to immediate risk and future health problems. Pray for young girls and women in the developing world and even among ethnic communities in the UK who are at risk from forced marriages, abuse and mutilation.

Men: Pray for men in the work place. Pray for those in positions of responsibility in the worlds of investment, finance and business and all those who work to support a family. Ask God to give fathers a greater desire to be responsible, loving providers and protectors of their children, to guide them and let them find the help they need to do what is right. Pray today for individual men and boys known to you. Ask God to direct them and give them encouragement and help in their spiritual, work and family life.

GRACE FOR ALL AGES

The elderly: Almost 1/6th(over 11 million)) of the UK population is over pensionable age. 8,000 of these are aged 100 or over. Pray for pensioners who live on low incomes and especially those who are vulnerable due to poor health, loneliness or mistreatment. Pray that they will turn to God for comfort and strength, and know His grace and peace. Pray that they would be held in greater esteem and cared for – especially in times of need .

Let's pray for those in the last days of their life, that they would come to "see" Jesus for, even if they have rejected him until now. Pray that the eyes of their hearts will be enlightened so that they can see their Lord and leave this world peacefully.

Word alive

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

1 John 4:16-21

PRAYER POINTS

- Have you experienced God's love in your life? Pray about this and thank him for his love for you.
- Ask God for courage to demonstrate his way of doing life and loving people, even if it is against accepted norms.
- Ask God for love to be (more) evident in your church.
- Give thanks for the rich variety of cultures that God has created and pray that they would bring mutual enrichment to different ethnic groups. Pray for the wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees. Pray for our legislators that they will frame laws that are just and compassionate.

LOVE

'It is not so much a love that seeks value in its object, but the love that creates value.' John Ortberg

Have you ever tried standing on your head or doing a handstand? It's not easy being upside down. It's unnatural. Jesus from the beginning of his ministry to its end came to embody and inaugurate the 'upside down kingdom of grace'.

Yet when we look more closely, Jesus was really turning things the right way up. He demonstrated the right way to live. His teaching challenged accepted practice: bless those who persecute you; better to give than receive; love your enemies. His practice overturned social norms: friend of outcasts, prostitutes and Samaritans. The spiritual and social consequences were revolutionary.

Jesus was energised by one thing – God's unrestricted love for the world. Every person on the face of the earth is loved and valued by God regardless of culture, creed or colour. That is what is so amazing about God's grace; it is a love beyond reason: it is a love that positively seeks out the best for others regardless of emotion, feeling or inclination.

This love can be realised not just in relationships with individuals. It can also be practised in our approach to groups whose behaviour and attitudes may seem strange to us. In our increasingly polarised world Christians are called to resist the acceptance of false stereotypes. Muslim does not equal terrorist, refugee does not equal troublemaker and asylum seeker does not equal sponger.

The Lord's call on us is to a life of unconditional love for others. Are we up for it?



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Word alive

'And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Matthew 6: 28-34

GIFT

'Thank you for your generosity and support. I've been constantly amazed at God's provision and people's generosity whilst living here. At home I never really had to trust God for providing my financial needs. Yet out here I've constantly had to rely on him. It's amazing how God has blessed and provided for me. There's a sense that everything belongs to him. Thank you again for your generosity.'

My 25-year-old daughter wrote this e-mail recently to some of her friends. Since July 2005 she has been working as a volunteer physiotherapist with Africa Inland Mission in Uganda. A.I.M. provides excellent support to its field workers but each has to be responsible for raising the finance they need.

Being older and 'wiser' I was a bit bothered about where the money would come from. But she never doubted that, if God wanted her there, he would provide. And he has. She is doing what she had set her heart on doing for years. She is making a real difference to people in the hospital and surrounding villages. Somehow it has struck a chord with people and unlocked their innate generosity.

The maths doesn't really add up. With only a small allowance she has enough and to spare. Other people I know earn huge salaries and always appear to be broke and in debt. God's economy or what?

Jesus encourages us not to worry about our provision. God knows we need food and clothes and will readily provide them. He generously gives us what we need, especially when we put him first. If God provides for flowers in the field and birds in the air will he not also provide for us?



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PRAYER POINTS

- Give thanks for God's provision for your needs. Do you have a need at the moment for finances? Pray about it and trust God. Do you need to give a gift to others? Do it cheerfully.
- Pray for a missionary you know and those behind the scenes who enable the work.
- Pray for a community regeneration project in your area.

SACRIFICE

Word alive

To obey is better than sacrifice...
1 Samuel 15:22

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'
Matthew 16:24

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Romans 12:1-2

On July 31st 1941 in Auschwitz, the infamous German concentration camp, sirens announced the escape of a prisoner. It was the rule that if one escaped ten were killed in reprisal.

The commandant and his Gestapo assistant walked up and down the lines of assembled prisoners and picked out Francis Gajowniczek as one of the ten. As he was picked he cried out, 'My poor wife and children.'

Hearing these words, Father Maximilian Kolbe stepped forward saying, 'I am a Catholic priest, I want to die for that man, he has a wife and children... I have no one.' His offer was accepted and with nine others he was thrown in an underground concrete bunker and left to starve to death. After two weeks they took out Father Kolbe, still alive with three others, and killed them.

It is easy to undervalue the meaning of sacrifice. Giving up chocolate for Lent is a popular choice as we remember the Lord's own fast at this time of the year. We can easily be misled into thinking that such a sacrifice gets us 'off the hook'. Once our pledge is fulfilled can we binge for another year?

Is there anything more valuable than something sweet? What about those things that really matter to us? Attitudes and agendas, personal goals and deep felt desires; these are the drives that propel mankind – and also the things that we must sometimes sacrifice. What has God asked us to do that we haven't done yet?

When we are willing to sacrifice anything for the gospel and give up everything that comes between us and God, we will know what sacrifice is.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for a renewal in your personal value system. Ask God what is important to him and prayerfully begin to make these matters your focus. Pray for a new understanding of what the sacrifice Jesus made means for you.
- Pray for those all over the world who are sacrificing themselves for the gospel – the persecuted church – those who are paying a great price for their faith.
- Pray for those facing difficult decisions – who are making a choice that may cost them dearly. Pray for grace and peace for them at this time.



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Word alive

The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

Be sure you are doing your own work well, for then you will have the personal satisfaction of work well done, and will not need to compare yourself with someone else.

Galatians 6:4

Whether you are Jew or Greek, slave or free, a man or a woman you are all one and equal in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

VALUE

A hard-working man is dogged every day by the feeling that he had an inadequate education. An attractive woman is paralysed by her father's words to her as a child that she was unattractive and not likely to marry. A young man was told he could never match family expectations and has to 'prove' them wrong.

Perhaps similar stories could be told about you: about how your life has been affected by self doubt and damaged self worth.

Is it possible for Christians to live with confused identities and low self esteem? Yes. Sadly hurts from our past are allowed to define both the present and the future. To compensate we often consider others superior, envy what they achieve and deprecate our own gifts and abilities. Alternatively, we criticise others to bring them to our level. Sometimes we live our lives through family, work or church.

It is important to value other people (Philippians 2:3), but we do not need to compare their value to ours. We should be grateful to belong to a body which celebrates diversity of role and gifts, some more evident than others (1 Corinthians 12). Paul writes that there is no race, social status or gender in Christ (Colossians 3:11). Everything is down to God's grace and choice, (1 Corinthians 12:5-7). Even rewards are not based on seniority, status, or intellect, but on grace (Matthew 20:1-16).

How should we view ourselves? Perhaps we need to be honest with God and ask him for a fresh encounter with his love. Once we see that our lives are intended by God and he has a purpose for us, we can then also value friends who both encourage and rebuke us.

The apostle Paul knew he wasn't perfect, but he told the Philippians (3:12) said 'I press on.' Let us do the same.



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FORGIVENESS

Word alive

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. 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.

Matthew 6:9-15

Jesus gave the Lord's Prayer to his followers as a pattern for all our praying. Afterwards, he commented on just one part of it: he was concerned to stress the vital importance of forgiving.

We must forgive the people who have hurt us if we want to receive forgiveness from God. It isn't that we have to earn God's forgiveness, but forgiving is like breathing. We can't breathe in unless we breathe out as well. In the same way, we can't expect forgiveness from God unless we are giving forgiveness to others.

Simon Peter once came to Jesus with a question: 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive someone who sins against me?' The rabbis may have said three times. When Peter suggested seven times he thought he was being generous, but Jesus rejected any kind of tally. If we're counting the number of times we forgive someone, we're not really forgiving them at all.

Jesus replied to his question with a parable about an ungrateful servant (Matthew 18:23-35). His story shows that if we choose to hold onto our bitterness against someone, it is as though we keep that person locked behind bars; but the consequence is that we become the prisoner.

Forgiving is rarely easy. Sin is serious, and we can't simply brush our hurt under the carpet. Sometimes we will have to persist in prayer, and maybe even ask someone to pray with us before we find freedom. But there is only one thing harder than forgiving, and that's not forgiving.

PRAYER POINTS

- Thank God for his free gift of forgiveness through Christ's death on the cross.
- Is there someone you need to forgive? Ask God to help you release them. Be willing to persist with this prayer, if necessary. Is there a practical step you could take to restore your relationship?
- Pray the Lord's Prayer. Pray it slowly, pausing after each line to allow time for reflection.
- Pray for families under pressure in your community. Pray for anyone you know whose marriage is in danger of breaking up because of unresolved hurt or conflict.



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HOPE

Word alive

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

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1:3-5

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for yourself that you will become more of a person of hope. Ask God to show you areas of your life that hinder this: attitudes, the way you speak, the way you think etc.
- Pray for your church that its whole ethos will exhibit the hope of the gospel. Pray about any issues that have adversely affected the life of the church and ask that God will graciously breathe his Spirit into those things and return it to hope.
- Pray for those in your community who are facing despair. Countless people are facing illness, financial pressure, breakdown in relationships, suffering from depression, etc. Pray that they will find hope. If you know of anyone in particular, ask God what you can do to help.

A dear friend had died. At the funeral service a signer was present to help some deaf people understand. As the meeting went on the speaker was frequently using the word 'hope'. The sign – it was observed – was crossed fingers. However the speaker began to talk about Christian hope – the certainty of life beyond the grave. And as he did so a different sign was being introduced: hands clasped together in rock-like certainty.

In the New Testament the word for hope means something that is in the future which is certain. It is not, as in normal English usage, something that might happen if we are fortunate. The rock-like certainty of the New Testament use of the word is what the signer was communicating at the service.

Peter, who saw the death and resurrection of Jesus, writes with excitement as well as certainty about our hope. 'Praise' is his word, because we have been born again into a living hope. Unlike virtually everything in this life, what we have been given in Christ is something that can never perish, spoil or fade. Our hope is guaranteed on the basis of Christ's resurrection from the dead.

God is a God of hope. So it is possible to 'overflow with hope' says Paul in Romans 15. He gives hope. Christians need not wallow in gloom or despair. The power of the Holy Spirit within us is what enables us to exhibit hope. Death is the most despairing of life's events. Yet even here, or especially here, it is possible to have hope for the future. Christians are people who have a certain and a living hope.

That's the difference.



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Sunday

Here we are at the end of week six. Have some time to catch up.

Don't cane yourself if you've missed a few days. What matters is that you are still on the journey and God has been hearing your prayers. Only one more week.

Have you seen some answers to prayer? Perhaps more importantly are you getting to know God better?

What struck you most about this last week's topics?

Ideas!

- Write or phone a friend. Tell them in the course of the conversation what God's love means to you.
- Alternatively, you could ask, 'Have there been times when you have been interested in spiritual things? Tell me about it.' See what an interesting conversation you might have!

Edinburgh 1905

Soon after the beginning of the Welsh Revival in 1904, a man called Joseph Kemp from Edinburgh went to Wales, where he spent a couple of weeks observing and experiencing the work and power of the Holy Spirit there. On his return he attended a large meeting in Charlotte Chapel. As he recounted his experiences there was an eager response to his story. A man asked for prayer and was the first of hundreds who became Christians during the subsequent revival in Charlotte Chapel. For a whole year prayer meetings were held, increasing in number and intensity, and characterised by passionate praying.

Joseph Kemp commented: "The people poured out their hearts in importunate prayer. I have yet to witness a movement that has produced more permanent results in the lives of men, women and children. There were irregularities, no doubt; some commotion, yes... After the first year of this work we had personally

dealt with no fewer than one thousand souls, who had been brought to God during the prayer meetings."

An account of one meeting reports that 'the fire of God fell'. A sudden overwhelming sense of the reality and awfulness of His presence and of eternal things was experienced. Prayer and weeping began, and gained in intensity every moment. Friends who were gathered sang on their knees. Each seemed to sing, and each seemed to pray, oblivious of one another. Then the prayer broke out again, waves and waves of prayer, and the midnight hour was reached. The hours had passed like minutes. It is useless being a spectator looking on, or praying for it, in order to catch its spirit and breath. It is necessary to be in it, praying in it, part of it, caught by the same power, swept by the same wind. One who was present says: "I cannot tell you what Christ was to me last night. My heart was full to overflowing. If ever my Lord was near to me, it was last night."



In the last days God says, 'I will pour out my spirit on all people'.

LIBERATING

Word alive

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

2 Corinthians 3:17

You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

John 14:14

You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

John 15:14-16

When Ann Robinson was interviewed on Parkinson she said: 'Every day my mother used to tell me, 'You can do whatever you want in the world!'' How liberating. Few people grow up with such encouragement. Many grow up with the opposite.

It seems that Jesus Christ had the same liberating and affirming attitude towards his followers. 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men' (Matthew 4:19).' 'You can ask me for anything and I will do it' (Matthew 18:19). 'If you have faith even as a mustard seed you can say to this mountain be moved' (Matthew 17:20). But they often had little faith, didn't understand about his death and resurrection, or the point of his mission. Nevertheless his choice of them was not mistaken. When the Spirit came, they became the leaders of a world-changing movement.

Likewise Jesus has hand-picked you to be his follower: 'You did not choose me, but I choose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last' (John 15:16).

There are no limits, no boundaries, to the provision and purposes of God. Perhaps you are unusually gifted to pray for things to change. Maybe you are to be in a team which does exploits for the kingdom of God. Perhaps you can demonstrate the love of God in practical and extravagant ways. Your potential is immense.

What possibilities are there for your church? With a liberating 'can do' mentality the potential for ventures of faith lies open. Risks can be taken, opportunities grasped and great exploits begun. The Holy Spirit working through the Word of God in fashioning our hearts and our congregations is a liberating, city-transforming and world-changing power.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for a view of yourself that is based on God's affirmation rather than life's undermining.
- Pray for a sense of liberation within your church this Sunday. Pray also for a 'can do' spirit to pervade church life: its services, house groups, leadership and business meetings.
- Pray for people to discover and exercise their ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Pray for people and churches to bear fruit that will remain.



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Word alive

While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, 'Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.' And they rebuked her harshly. 'Leave her alone,' said Jesus. 'Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.'

Mark 14:3-6

DARING

Mary of Bethany had it in mind to make an extravagant display of devotion. Perhaps she never thought she would be criticised. What she planned was out of the ordinary. It was shocking. She would pour expensive perfume worth the equivalent of thousands of pounds on Jesus' head! Would her nerves hold?

She loved Jesus and wanted him to know it, it was that simple. She poured the perfume on Jesus' head. Those present were outraged and harshly criticised her for this extravagance. But Jesus shielded her from it by saying, 'She has done a beautiful thing to me.'

The words 'Why this waste?' have, through the centuries, deflected good people from serving Jesus. People say it's a waste of time, money, education, even a waste of a life. But Jesus strengthens those who dare to stand out.

On a hot day in Athens a small Jew stood out in front of an audience of great thinkers. He had been brought to a respected and influential council where philosophies were debated – the Areopagus. Paul had a message and now a rare platform to speak. But how would he state the message? Would his nerves get the better of him?

Paul stood. He said that the God who created all there is cannot be shrunk to look like something we have made. He referred to their man-made religion as ignorance. He said that God gave us life on earth so that people should seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him. Paul's authenticating punch-line was the resurrection; it didn't go down well with his hearers. But he did communicate the message and a few believed. (Acts 17:16-34)

Whether acts of devotion or sharing our story, Christ is there. Dare to be different.



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PRAYER POINTS

- Pray about your own devotion to Christ. He does not necessarily want you to break social norms, but is your commitment to him such that you would dare to do anything? Tell Jesus how much he means to you.
- Pray for the worship life of your church that there will be 'beautiful things for Jesus'. Pray that 'heaven will touch earth' as people worship.
- Pray for the progress of the gospel in your area. Are people hearing about Christ? What can you or your church do?

CO-OPERATING

Word alive

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Romans 12:4

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

1 Corinthians 12:27

There was once a man who had seven sons. The first was strong as an ox; the second was fast and could outrun all the others; the third was quiet, preferring to read and study; the fourth was skilled with his hands; the fifth was easy-going; the sixth was tender-hearted and compassionate; and the seventh son loved to sing, but he was crippled in one leg.

The father loved each one, admiring their strengths and abilities. Together they would make a strong community. Soon, as is the case in parables, the time came for him to go on a long journey. He told his sons to work together: the strength of one helping the weakness of the other.

However, on his return, he found that each son had simply drawn close to others like himself. The strong son lived in a well-fortified town with others who were strong. The swift son had formed a hunting group. The third son had found others of an academic bent and was spending his time debating and learning. And so it went on.

The father was concerned how his seventh son had survived because his brothers had left him. However the seventh son knew he was weak, but also knew he could sing. He sought out others and together they built a loving community where the strength of one helped the weakness of another. The only way to join was an admission of need and a willingness to help.

The truth this story illustrates is that across congregations and churches it is co-operation, not perfection that achieves the effective functioning of the body.

PRAYER POINTS

- What is one of your strengths? Thank God for it and pray that you will have opportunities to use it to serve others.
- What is one of your weaknesses? Trust God with this and look for ways that will enable others serve.
- Pray for meaningful co-operation within your church and likewise between churches in your area. Unity across the body of Christ is something which enables non-believers to see the truth that Jesus came from God. (John 17:21) Pray that this will happen.



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INVITING

Word alive

'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

'Sir,' the servant said, 'What you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' 'Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.'

Luke 14:21-23

Some people just love to share what they have and eagerly invite people to join in. The picture Jesus gave about a great banquet needing guests to come and fill the places is a good illustration for us. (Luke 14:15-24)

The banquet is the feast in heaven. Unfortunately, in the story, many people seem to have far too many excuses about coming. Business projects got in the way ('I've just bought a field'). Checking out new purchases is another ('I've just bought five yoke of oxen'). Or relationships got in the way. ('I've just got married') Whatever the excuses – in the terms of the story – Jesus needed some people for a new task. He needed people to go and invite others to come.

What kind of people? Perhaps people like Andrew.

Andrew was one of the first disciples to meet Jesus. Immediately after meeting Jesus he found his brother Peter and told him 'We have found the Messiah.' And he brought him to Jesus (John 1:41,42). It was such a natural thing to do. He already knew Peter. He was probably going to see him anyway. All he did was say, 'Guess who I met today?' and the consequences of that conversation were far reaching. Peter became a follower of Jesus, led over 3000 people to Christ in one meeting and became a great leader in the early church. It began with Andrew's invitation.

Andrew had a flare for introducing people to Jesus. On another occasion he introduced some Greek people to Jesus (John 12:20-22). Who knows what the consequences of that introduction were.

Inviting: perhaps we can become more skilled and enthusiastic about inviting others to the good things God has prepared.



Pray for your 'big issue'
Pray for your 'three friends'
Pray for a powerful new wave of God's grace and truth in your community.

In the last days God says, 'I will pour out my spirit on all people'.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for a (re-)discovery of the goodness of the gospel of Jesus. Pray this for yourself. Confess if you have begun to see the gospel as neither 'news' nor particularly 'good'.
- Pray for enthusiastic 'invitation carriers' in your church. Pray for opportunities for yourself and others to share God's good news verbally and practically.
- Pray that the gospel would have first importance in your church. Pray for the excitement and sheer delight of seeing people become Christians to be felt among the congregation.

PERSUADING

Word alive

He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

Acts 18:26-28

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

1 Peter 3:15

There are many people who would become Christians if someone would give them a reason.

People need evidence. They need information – not religious jargon – about how our lives have actually changed. And they need reasons to believe: evidence, facts. It takes more than these things alone for someone to become a Christian, but they are the foundation for a real faith. First century Christians could give the names of people who had seen Jesus alive implying that those who were sceptical could check out the facts for themselves (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

They also had people who could communicate the truth persuasively – people like Apollos and Paul.

Apollos was a gift to the church. He had a brain and he was willing to use it. To begin with he didn't have the full message about Jesus. Fortunately Priscilla and Aquila realised and took him aside to 'explain the way of God more adequately'(!) Once he had got the full message, he was away. He was gifted in public debate and was able to handle all the awkward questions, proving. Not only that but he vigorously refuted people and proved that Jesus was the Messiah.

Paul also was one accustomed to giving reasons for his faith. In Ephesus he went to the synagogue for three months and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God. When he was thrown out he went to a lecture hall and spent the next two years ensuring that everyone in the city and its region heard about Jesus. And they did! (Acts 19:8-12)

Irrefutable facts, persuasive people, the power of the Spirit; all these ensure that everyone has a decent chance to hear about Jesus.



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PRAYER POINTS

- Thank God that our faith is based on solid evidence: that Jesus actually rose from the dead and that the historicity of the New Testament is unquestionable.
- Pray that you will be prepared to give the reason for the hope within you (1 Peter 3:15).
- Pray that God will raise up 'quiet persuaders' (like Priscilla and Aquila) and 'public debaters' (like Apollos and Paul).
- Pray for evidence to be given to your three friends.

Word alive

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Hebrews 12:22-24

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?

John 11:25-26

PRAYER POINTS

- Thank God for the things accomplished during these 40 days. Some issues may still not be answered, but you can thank God for that he has heard your prayer. You may want to decide how you will continue from here.
- Thank God for the door of heaven opened for us through Jesus' death and resurrection.
- Pray for your church that the things of eternity will be spoken about and experienced in such a way that the congregation becomes a people of hope.

ARRIVING

We have arrived. The journey has ended. We have spent the last 40 days praying – (well some of them anyway!) Has your big issue been resolved, changed, or improved? Have you had opportunity to talk with your three friends about your faith? Are there signs of revival? Have you discovered more of God?

No doubt it is a mixture of encouragements and perhaps some disappointments. But you have made it to the end.

Arriving at the end of a journey is sometimes a relief. But most of all it is an accomplishment. You have made it!

One day there will be the completion of a greater journey. When we reach the end of this life we will arrive and come 'home' like there has never been a home-coming before. Family, friends, freedom from pain, beauty, light, music, the consummation of all the hopes this world has had ... and glory.

'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' (1 Corinthians 2:9).

There we will meet someone who we have not seen in this life, but in whom we have believed. When we arrive we will see Jesus Christ as he is. He is preparing a place for us. If we have tasted beauty in this life, it's because it is a reflection – a pale one – of the beauty of the next. If we have known love in this life, then it's an echo of the pure love of heaven. If we have known joy in this life, then it's a picture of the abundant joy of the family of God in eternity. At this point we can barely imagine it, but the day will come and we will experience the real thing.

And it will have been worth every step of the journey.



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Going further in prayer 7

Deeper...

Practising his presence. Brother Lawrence, a 17th century monk who lived in France, wanted to 'pray without ceasing' and yet he had his daily duties to perform. His answer was to make all of his life a prayer and to be continually aware of God's presence; everything he did was to the glory of God. He felt the presence of God whether he was working in his kitchen or worshipping in his church.

Jesus told us the Kingdom of God is 'at hand' and 'within us'. The Kingdom of God is primarily where God is King, where he rules and his will is done. We are challenged therefore to allow God to be king in different areas of our lives. Jesus said that he is the light of the world (John 9:5), but he also said that we are (Matthew 5:14). We can therefore bring light to the world we live in. We do this by 'practising the presence of God'.

How? Each day we will see a lot of people. As we go through the day we can let our light shine – switching on a kind of spiritual 'torch'. We can pray that God's light will light up the lives of those we see. We can ask that God's Kingdom will come to their lives. We can pray that hope and love will affect the faces that are dark with despair. We can pray that darkness will be hurled back. As we pray through each day like this, committing people and situations to God, we will be opening the door for the King to come in!

Wider...

Unblocking the wells. Our towns and regions have witnessed many things over the course of their history: progress, battles, decadence, courage, cowardice, poverty or saintliness. This collective history has helped to form the distinctive character of our area, with all its traditions and prejudices. Some places have had a history of peace and tranquility, of harmony and spiritual blessing.

Others have been more marked by violence, hardness of heart, poverty, the occult or recurrent evil. Sometimes the roots of bitterness lie deep in a community's collective mind-set. Though they stem from long ago, these issues may never have been adequately addressed and laid to rest. In other places you can find memorials to acts of outstanding human kindness, prayerfulness or godliness. In the past, these places served as unique springs that refreshed the surrounding area, although today they may have been long forgotten, buried under the sands of time. Their original calling needs to be re-discovered and fulfilled in our generation. The ancient wells can be unblocked.

Salvation cannot be passed down from generation to generation. The gospel needs to be preached afresh. But there are some spiritual benefits that can be received from those who have gone before, a legacy from our parents in the faith. Those who in former years met with God can affect what, for them, lay in the future. Prayers may have been prayed or promises obtained that were never fulfilled through their own ministry in their life time. God began a work in them which is to be carried on by this generation.

As we are called to pray for the area in which we live, it is often helpful to go back into the past. Although many of these things are unknown to us, they are seen by God, for whom a thousand years is like a day. We can ask the Lord to forgive the sins of our Fathers, and to heal any painful spiritual legacies of the past (Daniel 9:8, Nehemiah 1:6; 2 Samuel 21:1-14). We can also ask him to renew in our day the great things that he did in our area long ago (Habakkuk 3:2). Remember, God's gifts and call are irrevocable (Romans 11:29).

PARTNERSHIPS

‘Live in harmony with each other. Don’t become snobbish, but take a real interest in ordinary people... As far as your responsibility goes, live at peace with everyone.’

Romans 12:16,18,19.

Traditionally churches have operated in their ‘own world,’ either working in isolation or maybe within their own denominations or networks. However over recent years growing numbers of churches have experienced partnership working beyond their usual networks. Partnerships have the potential to draw together resources and talents, to empower local people and to create change. Pray for varied and lasting partnerships between churches and between church and community.

Pray for partnership and teamwork to be part of all corporate activities in our communities and places of employment.

Pray for Christian movements and organisations dedicated to bringing together groups who have been in conflict. Ask to challenge people who need to apologise and make restitution, and give grace to those who have been wronged and need to forgive. Pray that he would give strength and wisdom to people who are trying to reconcile those involved in conflicts, disputes and legal arguments. Ask for insight as to how to rebuild broken relationships.

Pray for those who have become alienated from church. Ask God to heal their wounds and perceptions of church. Pray for organisations and ministries that bring the gospel to people who are reluctant to come to church.

Pray for families under pressure in your community. Pray for anyone you know whose marriage is in danger of breaking up because of unresolved hurt or conflict.

Praise God for the increasing numbers of Christians who are working in positions of authority and influence in all areas of society. Pray that God would help those who seek to be effective salt and light in environments that may seem hostile to the gospel.

Pray for this year’s ‘Global Day of Prayer’ on Pentecost Sunday. Ask God to draw together people from many churches, prayer leaders and other Christian organisations. For more information: www.globaldayofprayer.com.

Study Guide

WEEK 1 - FATHER

This week looks at furthering our relationship with our heavenly Father.

Let’s begin by considering father-child relationships. What is one of your enduring memories of a father?

Father

Read the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15.

Do we identify more with the son as he leaves home or as he returns? What attitude does the father demonstrate? Jesus tells the story illustrating God’s attitude to us. What is there encourages us to come near to God?

Child

Read Romans 8:15-16. What do you think spirit of sonship means? Is the term ‘child of God’ or ‘son of God’ something that you relate to? Could understanding this make a difference to your life?

In prayer

Spend some time identifying 3 friends who you want to pray for to become Christians and a ‘Big Issue’ that needs resolving. Also ask God to help you ‘get on board’ with what he is doing during these days.

WEEK 2 - PRIORITIES

The readings this week challenge us to think about how we spend our time – in other words what are our priorities. As with all relationships there are some activities that help them and others that hinder them. Look at Matthew 6:28-34. Here Jesus contrasts a life full of worry with one that is at peace. Read verse 33. He establishes a priority here.

Prioritising

What is the priority and how are we to understand the word, ‘first’?

As we struggle to make God our first priority, what hindrances do we encounter? What do we do that relegates him to second or third or fourth? What would we like to do during these 40 Days to make God our number one priority?

Finding

Read Matthew 13:44-46. It talks about finding ‘treasure’. Do we feel we are still seeking or would we say we have found what we are looking for in life? How does finding such ‘treasure’ affect our attitude to life and towards God?

Enlisting

How are God’s people described in 1 Peter 2:9-12? How do you feel about this kind of description of yourself? Do you recognise the part you play in God’s great purposes?

In prayer

Some people prefer praying alone; some find it more helpful to pray with others? Jesus’ prayer life and teaching advocates both. Discuss ways in which you can extend your personal prayer life, or develop your praying as a small group? Can you contribute to church or city-wide prayer?

Read page 7 about Catching the Wave. Pray the prayer written there and also continue to pray for your 3 Friends and your Big Issue.

WEEK 3 - LIVING

This week is about Christian living in a world where many people have great needs.

Reaching out

Read Romans 12:9-14.

What are some of the characteristics of Christian living that impress you in these verses? What is meant by sincere love? What would be the hallmarks of this sort of love? There are people we may consider as enemies – those who have hurt or crossed us. How does Paul say we should deal with them?

Responding

Read Romans 12:15-16.

This passage instructs us how to respond to people in need and people who we might consider beneath us. Many of the people we are praying for this week fit into one or both of these categories. How do Paul’s words challenge our attitudes? Is there something we can do as well as pray for these people?

Reconciling

Read Romans 12:17-21.

Broken relationships abound in our families, churches and communities. What advice does Paul give to avoid these and bring about reconciliation? How can this be worked out practically?

In prayer

Pray for issues that have emerged in your study and continue to pray for your 3 friends and your Big Issue.

Finish by reading the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12.

WEEK 4 - FAITH

Faith has several dimensions to it. It can involve asking, trusting, actions, waiting, testing and receiving from God. Sometimes it requires laying hold of God's promises to us.

Asking

Matthew 7:9-11 and Matthew 17:20 talk about having faith and asking.

How is it that faith as small as a mustard seed can move mountains? How can our faith increase? What is it that creates unbelief and leads to a lack of faith?

Acting

How did the men in Luke 5:18-26 demonstrate their faith?

Why do we need to turn our faith into actions?

Testing

Read Hebrews 11:17-19.

What happened to Abraham? What was the outcome of his testing. Has your faith ever been tested? What was the outcome of it?

In prayer

Read Going Further in Prayer (page 44). This highlights the problem of unanswered prayer. What encourages us to keep going in prayer?

Pray together about issues in this study and /or the regular 3 Friends, Big Issue and Catching the Wave.

WEEK 5 - RESTORING

This week's focus is on God's work in our lives and communities. It considers how he desires to restore us and bring wholeness. This involves appropriating the good and removing the bad.

Reflecting his likeness

Read 2 Corinthians 3:16-18.

Here Paul talks about the process of transforming our lives that is taking place. How does this happen? What is the goal of this transformation?

One of the most important areas of our lives to be transformed is our minds. We need to be able to think differently, to think 'Christianly.' Read Day 24 and discuss the issue of attitudes and mindsets described here. Can you identify one attitude/mindset/stronghold that needs to change for you?

Renewing confidence

Read 2 Timothy 1:6,7.

What experiences make us lose our confidence? What does these verses say about recovering the place that God has given? In contrast to timidity, God gives power, love and self discipline. Which of these do we most need this week?

Removing prejudice

Read Romans 15:7.

Some of our attitudes hinder our walk with God. The problem of prejudice is highlighted in Day 26. What does it mean to 'accept one another'. Why does Paul say we should do this? Are there people we have difficulty in accepting? How does God view them?

In Prayer

Pray together about issues in this study and /or your 3 Friends, Big Issue and Catching the Wave.

WEEK 6 - GRACE

God has given and continues to give all that we need for life. This is true for ourselves and for our communities. A word that describes the uniqueness of Christianity above other religions is 'grace' – unmerited favour.

Gift

Read John 3:16-18.

This is a good time to look again at the fundamentals of our faith. How is God described here? What does he do? What does he want? In response to what God is like and what he has done, what do people have to do? What are the consequences?

Hope

Read Day 34. What is the difference between human optimism and Christian hope? What is the living hope we have? How can this affect our communities?

Responding

In light of what God has done and what he gives, we ask the question, 'What can we do in response?' Read Romans 12:1-2 and decide.

In prayer

Take some time to be still before God. Allow the Holy Spirit to bring a strong perception of the riches of what God has done for us. Express gratitude to God. Give him your life as an offering of love.

If appropriate, move on to pray about your 3 Friends, Big Issue and Catching the Wave.

WEEK 7 - PURPOSES

God works out his purposes on earth in partnership with his people: through our interactions with the world and through our prayers. The Church is both his beloved bride and the living and moving body of Christ.

Rediscovering his purposes

Read Acts 2:42-47

This is a picture of life in the church at the very beginning. How is it described? What are some of the characteristics and activities of the church then? What do you think people were

learning and feeling through their involvement? What were the effects on the rest of the population?

Read page 57. This account of the Moravian Christians in the C18th describes how they rediscovered some important aspects of God's purposes. It was a special outpouring of God's spirit which initiated a worldwide movement. What impresses you most about what happened?

The centuries have come and gone. Our context is very different today. However, of the attributes of the early church, what is positively evidenced in your church today? What attracts you to your church? What characteristic of the early church do you think it would be good to rediscover?

Risk-taking

Read Mark 14:3-9.

How much risk did this woman take? What were the consequences? She did 'what she could' and Jesus described it as a 'beautiful thing.' What is it that we are able to do that would likewise be a 'beautiful thing'? What risks are there?

In prayer

Spend time considering in prayer any 'risks' you feel you could take in expressing your devotion to Jesus or in taking a stand for him.

Thank God for answers to prayer though this period and continue to pray for your 3 friends, your Big Issue and for the 'wave' till it comes!

40 DAYS

PRAYER GUIDE

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**LORD WE ASK THAT
YOU WOULD ACT NOT
ACCORDING TO THE
POVERTY OF WHAT WE
ARE, OR BELIEVE, BUT
ACCORDING TO THE
GREATNESS OF WHO
YOU ARE AND WHAT
YOU CAN DO.**