

WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Christ Church, Crouch End Hill

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No: 50

PRAYER

Introduction

Many believe that we are living at one of the most extraordinary and exciting moments in history. In many parts of the world we are seeing society under strain socially, economically and politically.

Graphic scenes of war, violence, famine, disease and pollution are constantly before us on TV screens in our living rooms. As we progress deeper into the 21st century there is much to concern us about our wounded world.

Yet at the same time there is a stirring going on among God's people. Right across the world there seems to be a new clarion call going out from the portals of heaven, which is a calling to prayer. There has never been such a widespread desire among Christians to pray. Whether it be expressed in a praise march on the street, or contemplative prayer in a side chapel, there can be no doubt that the Spirit of God is urging the church into places of deeper and sustained intercession. It is one highly effective response to a wounded and lost world. Only God knows what harvest this will reap, but we have every cause to have great expectations of our God of all hope.

In this study we will discuss our understanding of the person of God and our relationship with him. Your concept of God determines your expectations in prayer.

Read Matthew 6: 9-13

The Lord's Prayer

'The Lord's Prayer' as it is known must be the most famous prayer in the world. It is recorded by Matthew and Luke. In Matthew's gospel it comes as part of that great package of Jesus' teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9-13). Prayer is one of the three "acts of righteousness" mentioned in verse 1 of the chapter, the other two being giving (6:2-4) and fasting (6:16-18). Matthew was keen that we should see this prayer at the heart of this great section of teaching. No doubt Jesus repeated his teaching on prayer on a number of occasions.

In Luke's gospel (11:2-9), Jesus teaches about this prayer after he himself has been praying (11:1). The disciples were so struck by Jesus' prayer, that they asked him, *Lord teach us to pray*. Most translations of the prayer in Matthew's gospel do not include the doxology at the end—*for yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever ... Amen*. This is not found in the early manuscripts, but is present in later ones, and was adopted by the early church and became a normal part of the Lord's Prayer.

- As a child, did you have a standard prayer that you recited? If so, how much can you remember?

- What motivates the disciples to ask about prayer at this point (Luke 11:1)

- In Jesus model prayer (Luke 11: 2-4) what two concerns related to God came first?

Read Romans 8: 1-2; 15-17; 26-27

- What truths shown here can help you to handle feelings of guilt and unworthiness?

Discovering the Father

Although God is in heaven, the whole thrust of the Lord's Prayer and the passages from Romans (Romans 8:1-2; 15-17; 26-27) is that God is a Father who is intimate with us. The word **Abba** is the name an infant gives to his/her father. The modern equivalent would be 'Daddy'. When we read the gospels, one of the first things that strikes us is the deep, personal and intimate relationship of Jesus and his Father. For the faithful Jew, who did not even dare mention the name of God, to hear Jesus speaking so intimately to him must have been quite shocking. And then, more shocking still, Jesus invites his disciples into this same intimacy.

For many of us, there is still a journey of discovery we need to make. We may have known God as a remote and even severe parent figure, but have yet to discover him as the tender Father. We are permitted to know him as a Father because of the work Jesus has done on the cross, and we are enabled to experience him as Father by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Our life's experience of our own parenting or early experiences of God received in church (e.g. a distant God who resides only in the east end of church) can make it very difficult to comprehend this. For some, (e.g. those who have suffered abuse) talk of an intimate relationship with Father can evoke painful memories.

But God has provided us with the gift of the Holy Spirit who enables us to experience this intimacy with Father. Apart from the Romans passage, see also Galatians 4:6.

The same Spirit who makes us aware of Father, also helps us to pray to him, even when we feel weak.

Read Psalm 27

- Which part of this psalm are special for you today?
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Perhaps you can use some of the verses as your own prayer.

Notice especially the verses that speak about the protecting strength of the Father (e.g. 27:1 and 5), and others that speak about his tenderness and his beauty (e.g. 27:4 and 10). Spend a few moments thanking him for being your Abba.

Prayer Exercise

During the coming weeks you are invited to take on three prayer projects. During the first week you will be invited to make your choices about these. The natural thing to do is to choose subjects which you are interested in and have a concern for. The three prayer projects are as follows:

- Personal prayer need
- Local prayer need
- Global prayer need.