

## WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Christ Church, Crouch End Hill

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No: 52

### LORD TEACH US TO PRAY III

#### **Give us today our daily bread**

To *intercede* means to stand between. The supreme act of intercession was on the Cross when Jesus stood between us in our sinfulness and God in his holiness. It cost him his life. Intercession always has a close connection with the cross and indeed with the resurrection. We come to God with the wounds of this sinful world, and we look to God who both weeps for this world understanding its wounds, as well as bringing hope of resurrection.

Besides the example of Jesus Christ, we will focus on someone who was addressed as a friend of God. His name is Abraham. His extraordinary encounter with God over Sodom in Genesis 18:16-33 gives us an important insight to prayer. It also echoes some of the points we learnt last week about listening to God after making requests—not just rushing away when God wants to speak to us.

#### **Read Genesis 18:16-33 and discuss briefly.**

Sodom was a city that had done terrible things and was so evil that God planned to destroy it. He decides to tell Abraham his plans. Abraham is upset by this, and enters into a dialogue with God which has a clear bargaining scenario about it.

Anyone who has been to the Middle East or Africa will be very familiar with the bargaining and negotiation that has to go on in order to buy something. This story has the same feel about it, and it seems almost outrageous to imagine little Abraham bargaining with almighty God.

Yet the story clearly shows that God is willing to listen. He listens because Abraham is the friend of God (James 2:23), and as such is able to enter into this negotiation, not in fear and trepidation, but as a trusted friend. Because Abraham is God's friend, God greatly respects him.

He tells Abraham his plans, but not only that, he gives Abraham the opportunity to speak in the court and speak in defence of the righteous people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Notice how Abraham is humble yet confident in God's presence (Genesis 18:22-27).

## **Please discuss your answers**

- What impresses you about the conversation between God and Abraham?
  - a. God's willingness to hear Abraham
  - b. Abraham's boldness
  - c. God's expectations of Abraham
  - d. Abraham's compassion
  
- What was Abraham really saying to God?
  - a. be fair to me and my family
  - b. don't punish everyone because of the wicked
  - c. are you open to discussion?
  - d. keep my nephew safe
  
- What did Abraham mean when he said, "I am nothing but dust"?
  - a. he was admitting his true worth
  - b. he had no right to speak
  - c. God could strike him dead
  - d. God is almighty
  
- What did God's openness suggest?
  - a. God is just
  - b. holy people bring benefits to wicked people
  - c. Abraham was getting through to God
  - d. the righteous are important to God
  - e. Abraham could trust God
  
- What made God angry at Sodom and Gomorrah?
  - a. he had a bad day
  - b. their total disregard for God
  - c. sexual immorality
  - d. their corruption was catching
  
- What made Abraham different from the people of Sodom?
  - a. he would teach his children about God
  - b. he was chosen by God
  - c. he was a righteous man
  - d. his children would live holy lives

## **My Own Story - Please discuss your answers**

- When God gives me the opportunity to make a difference, I:
  - a. remain silent
  - b. make a tentative suggestion
  - c. insist on what I think is right
  - d. trust God to work it out
  
- When I am faced with events that do not make sense, I:
  - a. question God's intentions
  - b. believe that God is in control
  - c. do not involve God
  - d. become confused
  
- As I discuss my problems with God, I expect he will:
  - a. listen patiently
  - b. become angry
  - c. ignore me
  - d. grant my requests
  
- I believe my presence in my community or family has the effect of:
  - a. "salt and light"
  - b. advocacy
  - c. a judge
  - d. compassionate activist
  - e. a dash of salt in the ocean
  - f. rubbing salt into a wound
  
- What gives me hope for my community and extended family is:
  - a. there are a few righteous people here
  - b. God is at work bringing people the gospel
  - c. we have good Christian leadership
  - d. God is rich in mercy
  
- In order for salvation to come to my community, I am willing to:
  - a. pray for it daily
  - b. share my faith with others
  - c. get involved with my neighbours
  - d. contribute to the ministry of my church
  - e. engage in community work where I can demonstrate God's love
  
- In order for salvation to come to all of my family, I am willing to:
  - a. pray for them daily
  - b. share my faith with \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. respect and build up the faith of others
  - d. spend less time at church and more with my family
  - e. rebuild bridges of trust

## **The Prayer Jigsaw**

The prayer jigsaw illustrates eight important aspects of intercessory prayer. They are as follows ...

### **Listening to the heart of God**

This is an essential part of the intercession time. Rather than coming to the prayer time with our agendas of our own concerns, we want to be open to hearing God for his concerns which may or may not coincide with ours. This will mean in practice having a time of stillness at the start of our prayer time, opening our hearts to the Spirit of God. A time of worship is a very useful preparation for this, as we focus not on the needs of the world, but on God.

### **Use imagination**

As we come to pray, ask God to help by releasing prophetic and visionary gifts to us to help us imagine effectively the situations for which we are praying. The writer to the Hebrews encourages us to pray for those in prison *as if you were their fellow prisoners*, and those who are being ill treated *as if you yourselves were suffering* (Hebrews 13:3). This suggests entering into their world in our imagination. As we open ourselves in this way we may well find that the Holy Spirit gives a searching insight into a particular situation. This may have a prophetic dimension, as God reveals actual situations that require prayer.

### **Praying with the mind**

God expects us to use our intelligence when we pray! (By intelligence here, we mean our knowledge and understanding of a subject, not an ability to be or sound clever). This may be an obvious point, but it is one which needs to be made when groups get a bit 'super-spiritual'. Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:15 clearly says that praying in the spirit and praying with the mind have equal value, and both need to be used and neither should be denied or deemed inferior.

Example: During the prayer time, one member of the group who works at the unemployment benefit office speaks to the group for a few moments about their work, giving some helpful insight and making some specific suggestions for prayer.

Next week, we shall mention perseverance, posture, silence and possibly praying in the Spirit.