

# Walking the Way

Living the life of Jesus today

## HOLY HABITS

## PRAYER

WOKING UNITED REFORMED  
CHURCH





# **HOLY HABITS**

## **PRAYER 1**

**What is prayer?**

# HOLY HABITS – PRAYER

## INTRODUCTION

**'Discipleship flourishes in an atmosphere of grace;  
it withers in an environment of rules and regulations'**

“Jesus called his first followers into community; to be with him and to be sent out by him. To eat with him, pray with him, learn with him; to be challenged, transformed and guided, and when life and faith failed to be forgiven, restored and sent out again. Together they fed the hungry, proclaimed Good News and opened people's eyes to the much longed for Kingdom of God. They also lived sacrificially, suffered and were granted glimpses of glory.

Whenever we see the discipleship movement of Jesus being renewed we see a rediscovery of church as missional community with a renewed emphasis on both outward-looking service and inward-focused depth of relationship. We see a trinity of vital relationships reinvigorated; relationships with the divine Trinitarian community, relationships with a world in need of love and relationships with fellow disciples.”

*(Holy Habits Andrew Roberts page 93)*

This community is described by Luke in Acts 2 and is the template for the life that Christians aspired to live.

### **ACTS 2:42-47**

**“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”**

## SESSION 1

Prayer is one of the ten Holy Habits which are part of Walking the Way. At Woking URC we have chosen this as the first Holy Habit to study as it underpins everything we do. As part of church life we prefer to open and close any meeting with prayer to re-orientate us in right relationships with God, with others and with the world. It is an antidote to the selfishness of sin.

There are many helpful ways of thinking about Prayer. One is by using the letters of ACTS:

- Adoration - Praising, worshipping God, for who He is
- Confession - Asking God to cleanse us from sin
- Thanksgiving - Believing, acknowledging God's grace
- Supplication - Our specific prayer requests

This gives you a good skeleton upon which to build your prayers and prevents them from becoming shopping lists of wants. Praying to our heavenly Father should have some of the characteristics of a conversation with an earthly father. No one would just blurt out a list of requests without some preamble to establish an appropriate environment. Biblical foundation for this approach can be found in the following verses:-

Psalm 63:1-4   Psalm 51:1-4   Psalm 107:1-2   Psalm 54:1-2

There are two great biblical cries of Prayer:

- the cry of praise typified by the word 'Hallelujah'
- the cry of lament captured in phrases such as 'How long?'

God is shown to hear and respond to both cries. Prayer needs to be

explored from both these perspectives, confident in the one to whom you pray, who holds and hears you as you do.

## **REFLECTIONS**

Whenever Christians meet together, they pray. Sometimes the words are well loved and have been recited by the church for ages past. Sometimes the words are fresh and raw. On other occasions, prayer is silent. Or Prayer may arise simply from the shared activity of people who love Jesus Christ 'living, working in our world'.

The simple definition of prayer is that it is a conversation with God; it is waiting on God - both in listening and serving. Prayer is sustaining, encouraging, nurturing, exciting and engaging. It is the lifeblood of the church.

To help us form the habit of prayer we are going to need to understand the habit, what it is and why it is necessary. When, where and how it should be practiced, and lastly who is involved. Once we understand the habit of prayer, we need to form and establish a regular habit using all the resources we have to hand.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE HABIT**

There are many verses and passages in the Bible which help us with our understanding of prayer. What prayer is, how to pray and what to say, where and when to say it, including verses to help us with our studies:-

‘Endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.’ (*Romans 5:4-5*)

This resource invites us to make Prayer a Holy Habit, both on our own and when we come together. May Prayer be the spiritual breath we breathe and may it deepen love’s transforming power in the world.

## The Basics of Prayer

This first session is concerned with the basics of prayer, setting the scene for your conversation with God.

General questions to consider before starting are:-

How do you pray?

Where do you pray?

Do you do anything special with your hands or eyes?

What words do you use?

Does it matter what sort of things we pray about?

- 1) The following passages all describe manners of praying, some are valid today, others need bringing up to date.

Read 1 Samuel 1:12-18 Ezra 8: 21– 23 Daniel 6:10-11

Joel 1:13-14 Matthew 6:5-7

How relevant are these practices today?

2) “Every now and then when I invite a group to pray I will say “Let us pray,” pause for a moment then ask people to open their eyes and reflect on what they have just done. Most, if, not all, on hearing the words “let us pray” close their eyes, put their hands together and slightly bow their heads. And there is nothing wrong with that. I do it myself very often. The posture expresses devotion, and the hands and closed eyes say this is important and I want to concentrate on this. All good stuff. But there is so much more to prayer than this and so many ways in which we can experience and live the most frequently practised of the holy habits.”

*Holy Habits Andrew Roberts page 151)*

Discuss - your ways and ideas may be helpful to others in your group.

What was an innovation in Jesus' time, and distinguished the followers of Christ from other religious groups, is none the less relevant today, but we live in a different world and need to stand out from the rest of the population who have no faith. However, just as we can have a conversation with our earthly parents anywhere and in any position, in public or in private, the same holds for our conversations with our heavenly Father.

3) Having covered the manner of prayer, now we need to look at the content of prayers.

Read the following:-

Philippians 4:6 1 John 5:14-15 Matthew 18:19 – 20 1 Tim 2:1

Matthew 21:22 Isaiah 55:11 Ephesians 6:18 Mark 11:24

Luke 18 9 -14

What do these passages tell us? Discuss.

4) Are there any limitations or exclusions on what might be the subject of prayer?

5) "Prayer is, of course, a mystery. It's become quite commonplace to say this. Many Christians, including many clergy, have come to accept that they don't find prayer easy, that they don't really understand what it does or can do.....But there is good scriptural warrant for finding prayer puzzling and mysterious. St. Paul, in a famous passage, says, that 'we don't know how to pray, or what to pray for as we ought', and says that we therefore depend on God's spirit to help us, catching us up into the agonizing dialogue between the living God and the pain of the world, even though we don't really understand what's happening."  
*((Romans 8:18-27) The Lord and His Prayer , Tom Wright page 4-5).*

Looking at Romans 8:26-27

The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness. We do not even know how we ought to pray, but through our inarticulate groans the Spirit himself is pleading for us, and God who searches our inmost being knows what the Spirit means.



God is the heart of the world and the heart of our own hearts, the source of all that is, the life in all life, the truth we touch in all our search for meaning. God loves us into being, and in that loving enables us to grow and to experience more deeply the sorrow and the joy of the world, and to live lives that are thankful, humble and open to wonder. Prayer is the breathing of that life, the struggle to find words which express both our deepest desires and our darkest insights into who we are and what we are capable of. In every situation, Prayer is a possibility and therefore an invitation. A moment of sheer thankfulness in the day. Watching at the bedside of a dying loved one. A cry for help when we don't know how we will be able to deal with some crisis. A bewildered love that reaches out in response to the need of people thousands of miles away. A glimpse of glory that draws wonder from the depths of us. A silence before reading the Bible or at the end of the day. All of these are praying, reaching out to God with longing. Sometimes we try to express that longing in (always inadequate) words, and Paul reminds us that, in that groping after language, the Holy Spirit is weaving a prayer in us.

*(Holy Habits Prayer page 13)*

Discuss

6) However natural or difficult we may find praying on our own, something happens when we come together to pray, whether in twos or threes or in worship together as a congregation. Together we are the body of Christ, so when we pray together, we pray as Christ's body. In the language of the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is the great High Priest, our representative in heaven. Jesus knows our weakness, our slowness and hardness of heart, and loves us anyway, and gives himself for the life of the world. We don't have to have Prayer all worked out. We pray in the name of Jesus, so Jesus takes our prayer into the heart of God.

Discuss the differences between praying on your own or praying in a group.

This resource invites us to make Prayer a Holy Habit, both on our own and when we come together. May Prayer be the spiritual breath we breathe and may it deepen love's transforming power in the world.

*(Holy Habits Prayer page 13)*

Having looked at Prayer in a general way the next sessions will look at specific prayers and Prayer situations.



**HOLY HABITS**

**PRAYER 2**

**How do we pray?**

## **ACTS 2:42-47**

**“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”**

## **SESSION 2**

### **HOW DO WE PRAY?**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

**“while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.”**

**Acts 6:4**

At the conclusion of Session 1 our stated aim was to try to establish Prayer as a Holy Habit. So how do we hope to achieve Prayer as a Holy Habit? In order to do this we need to refresh and re-invigorate our prayer lives. New ideas for prayer, and ways of praying based on the classic questions of **how, what, when, where, who** and **why do we pray**. In Session 1 we looked at a definition of prayer which is one part of the **what** of the equation. Now we are going to examine the content

and structure of our prayers which is **how** do we pray. The best place to start would seem to be with the prayer our Lord himself gave us to use.

## FORMING THE HABIT

### The Lord's Prayer

Read Mathew 6:9-16

Luke 11:2-4

- 1) Identify the differences between the two versions of the Lord's Prayer and discuss their importance and significance.

Luke presents prayer as one of the hallmarks of the first Christian communities and in Acts he introduces the phrase "the prayers" (Acts 2:42) which implies the use of certain specific regularly used prayers. It is suggested by F. F. Bruce that the community's prayers would have been mainly Jewish prayers with added Christian flavouring.

C. K. Barrett follows a similar line suggesting that the Lord's Prayer may have been included in the formal prayers of the community.....so very early on in the Christian tradition we have spontaneous and set prayers both playing a valuable part in living the adventure of discipleship. Similarly public and private prayer. A reminder to us not to be too precious about our preferred ways of praying.

*(adapted from Holy Habits Andrew Roberts page 153)*

We have two versions of the Lord's Prayer to look at from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke above, which have been re-written for daily use in the traditional form of:-

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.

Amen

And the modern form of:-

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.

“The Lord’s prayer is unusual in that Jesus is very precise in His teaching as to how to pray as He does not frame His answer as a parable or another question. This prayer is used in almost every gathering of Christians of every denomination all over the world, and even those who are not regular churchgoers can probably recite it from memory.”

(adapted from *Cover to Cover, Great Prayers of the Bible page 6*)

“What the Lord’s Prayer provides here at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount is a framework. Jesus doesn’t say that you should always use identical words, and actually when Luke gives his version of the prayer it is different in small but interesting ways (Luke 11:2-4). It looks as if

Jesus intended this sequence of thought to act more like the scaffolding than the whole building, though of course the prayer is used as it stands, (usually in the longer version we find here in Matthew) by countless Christians every day. Already by Jesus' day the Jewish patterns of prayer were well established, with short but powerful prayers to be said three times a day. Maybe Jesus intended this prayer to be used like that as well."

*(New Testament Prayer for Everyone Tom Wright page 6)*

These are prayers based on the Lord's Prayer in "text speak"

dad@hvn, ur spshl

we want wot u want &r urth 2b like hvn

Giv us food & 4giv r sins lyk we 4giv uvaz

Don't test us! Save us!

Becoz we no ur boss ur tuf & ur cool 4eva! OK?

Hi God UR gr8

What U want OK

Feed us 4give us

4 we 4give

Don't tempt, save

All is 4U always

Amen

*(By the Light of the Lord's Prayer Christopher Radley pages 32 & 35)*

2) Does the Lord's Prayer from either Gospel follow the suggested format of praying known as ACTS, if so, separate the prayer into the relevant sections.

3) Using the structure you established in question two divide into small groups and write your own prayers reflecting contemporary phraseology for use today. We are not looking for modern versions of the Lord's Prayer but original prayers based on the framework of the Lord's Prayer.

The prayers [referred to in Acts 2:42] are above all those offered together with the Jewish congregation. This by no means precludes the possibility that the Christians also had their own prayers and set times of

devotion. If Haenchen is right then this presents an interesting opportunity and challenge in our multi-faith age. Can we/is it right to pray with or alongside those of other faiths.

*(Holy Habits Andrew Roberts page 155-156)*

4) Discuss the last sentence above.

## **The Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis**

These two spontaneous but different prayers of praise were written around the birth of Jesus. Look at the structure and significance of the Magnificat as it moves from Mary to Israel. Is the structure of the Nunc Dimittis similar as it moves from Simeon to Israel?

Read Luke 1:46-55 (The Magnificat)

Luke 2:29-32 (Nunc Dimittis)

5) Compare and contrast these two prayers.

6) Why do you think that these prayers have been used in so many formats as well as being the basis for other hymns.

Composers who have set these prayers to music include Claudio Monteverdi(1610), Vivaldi (1717 or 1719 ), Johann Sebastian Bach (1723, rev. 1733). Other notable examples include C.P.E. Bach, Anton Bruckner, Rachmaninoff and, more recently, John Rutter also composed a setting, as well as Arvo Pärt.

Together with the Nunc Dimittis, the Magnificat is a regular part of the Anglican Evensong. The "Mag and Nunc" has been set by many composers – such as Thomas Tallis, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Herbert Sumsion, Charles Wood and John Tavener – of Anglican church music, often for choir a cappella or choir and organ. The canticles are sung every day at one cathedral or another. Charles Villiers Stanford wrote a Magnificat in every major key, and Herbert Howells published 18 settings over his career, including Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis for St Paul's Cathedral.



## Prayer Situations

Here are some suggestions for different ways of praying that might enhance your prayer life.

Appropriate worship songs can set the mood for you and put you in the right place to energise your conversation with God. Maybe think about praying in different surroundings or using pictures to remind you of God's infinite imagination.

If you belong to a House Group lighten up your worship by using Prayer Consequences, writing a line of the prayer, then passing the paper to your neighbour for them to write the next line and on round the group. Try this technique to build a prayer up in rounds and see how it turns out. Give the start words for each line but leave the ending to each individual.

A prayer room or area with candles, inspirational pictures and verses, bibles in different translations and atmospheric music can be used to stimulate your senses.

Try praying as you go for a walk looking around as you walk along taking in all the scenery.

Think about using all or each of your senses; candles for smell, worship music for hearing, food for taste, pictures for sight and smooth pebbles or a holding cross for feel are all ways to stimulate your senses.

Have you considered praying before any activity such as saying Grace before a meal and finishing the activity with thanks for completion.

Have you thought of offering to pray for somebody who looks in need of support (never force this on anyone).

What about praying before going on a journey and then giving thanks once the journey is over.

Don't forget to set aside times in the day to just sit quietly for five or ten minutes and listen to what God has to say to you.

Meditation while listening to suitable music such as Pachelbel's Cannon or The Lark Ascending if you like classical music can help you to listen for God to speak.

Prayer situations when you feel unable to pray will be covered in a later session.



# **HOLY HABITS**

## **PRAYER 3**

### **When prayer is unanswered**

## **ACTS 2:42-47**

**“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”**

## **SESSION 3**

# **WHEN PRAYER IS UNANSWERED**

### **INTRODUCTION**

**But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.**

**James 1:6-8**

We have now looked at the model prayer that Jesus gave us to use so we have an answer to the question how should we pray. The question for this session is when should we pray. The straight answer is any time and anywhere. There is no time that is inappropriate, God is always ready to hear from us as any earthly parent would. God will always try to give us what we ask for, but some prayers still go unanswered and we

do not receive the looked for response. Throughout this session we will look for possible reasons for this lack of response.

## **UNDERSTANDING GOD WHEN HE DOES NOT ANSWER**

God has three types of answer for our prayers; yes, no and not yet or wait. He will give us the answer in His time, according to His will, which will be for the greater good. Sometimes the timing is wrong for God's purposes to be fulfilled. Sometimes the answer may be denied or delayed because He has a greater blessing waiting for us.

Read the following passages:-

Psalm 66:18                  Proverbs 28:9                  Isaiah 1:15-17, 59:1-2

Zechariah 7:8-13          Matthew 6:9-10              John 1:6

James 4:1-4                  1 John 1:10

- 1) What do you learn from these passages about the effect that disobedience has on God's willingness to hear—and respond to our prayer?      (*Prayer Participant's Guide Philip Yancey page 75*)
- 2) What do you think will happen if you try to manipulate God or hide what is really in your heart when you pray?

Not all prayers are unanswered because of our state, but because God's way is better. King David prayed that his son would not die - his next union produced Solomon. What if David's son had lived and reigned as king instead of Solomon? Four men prayed to die - Moses, Job, Jonah and Elijah all prayed to die—God ignored them. Prophet Habakkuk prayed for deliverance from the Babylonians, Jeremiah prayed that Jerusalem would not be destroyed - the prayers of both prophets went unanswered. What if the prophets' prayers had been answered and Israel had established itself as a world power, its citizens holding their religion tight to their chests, unshared with the world? What if Paul had been healed, making him a more agile

missionary perhaps, but one of insufferable pride as he feared?

*(Prayer Philip Yancey page 226)*

On a personal level; while I was still working, I was transferred to a different team even though I prayed very hard for this decision not to go through. I tried my utmost not to have to move. However the move took place and perforce I learnt new skills. Then redundancy reared its ugly head. However, because of the new skills I had learnt, I obtained a substantially better position even before working out my notice. God had His plans in place for my good even though I went through a period of unhappiness.

### **Unanswered Prayer - Lazarus**

Read John 11:1-44

3) Why did Jesus not do as Mary and Martha requested?

4) Can you explain why unanswered prayer can be important?

### **Unanswered Prayer - Jesus**

Read Luke 22:39-46

5) What does Jesus' prayer to His Father teach us about the nature of God?

6) Jesus prays to His Father, then submits himself fully to His Father's work in the world. How might that example influence your pattern of prayer?

7) Does the depth of this prayer and the context in which it is set have anything to say about our praying for minor matters?

However there are other times when prayers are unanswered and this may be because they are against the will of God or we have barriers that we have erected in our hearts. These barriers are known as sin

when we are being hypocritical saying one thing but doing another.

## **Unanswered Prayer - Job**

At the beginning of the book of Job, he has enjoyed good wealth and health and is well respected by others - his life in general has been a very comfortable and easy one. But now disaster after disaster strikes and he loses livestock and children and his life is in ruins. Through the rest of the book of Job we see how Job is affected as he talks to his friends.

Read Job 30:20-31

8) How is Job feeling? Why is he feeling this way?

9) Which phrases stand out to you?

10) What is Job's main sin?

*(Adapted from Holy Habits - Prayer)*

## **Don't Disobey God**

Moses was the greatest intercessor for Israel. He prayed faithfully and many of his prayers were answered, but on one occasion God did not give him what he wanted.

Read Deuteronomy 3:23-28

Moses wanted to cross the River Jordan to the promised land, but God had already said that this would not happen because of a previous sin.

Read Numbers 20:7-12

11) how did Moses disobey God and what else did he do wrong?

God in His grace forgave Moses for his sin, but God in His government forced Moses to reap what he had sown. We need to say “Thy will be done” to enter the promised land.

God reigns supreme and even his son and one of His chief prophets still had to obey His will. Jesus shows His relationship with God by His quick acceptance of God’s supremacy.

Read Hebrews 5:7-10

12) If Jesus had not chosen to obey His Father what would the consequences have been?

### **What can we do when our prayers seem to go unanswered?**

Look into our hearts and make sure that we are acting inside God’s will. As is said in Matthew 7:7-11 all we have to do is ask and we shall receive and from Luke 1:37 “nothing will be impossible with God”. If your prayers still go unanswered, try to maintain your trust in God because He may have another better plan for the situation to be revealed later.

Jesus compared God to a wise father who will not give his children things that are not good for them. Of course, when terrible pain does not decrease despite fervent prayers, it is natural to wonder how God can bring anything good out of such a bad situation. But the Christian faith has always involved trust that, even in disappointments and setbacks, ‘God works for good for those who love him.’



## **Prayer Aims**

One of the more difficult skills to practice is that of listening to God. How do we know when He is speaking to us? Is that insistent idea in our minds God speaking or something else?

## **Answered Prayer**

Many years ago, at the end of a cell group meeting, the leader suggested that as an exercise, we might like to think of a bible verse to describe the person sitting on our right. On my right, I had David, an older man and a mature Christian. How to find the right verse to describe this lovely man, a faithful servant of Christ. So on the way home I started to pray and swiftly received a short answer "You have done enough". This totally threw me - how could I pass this very bald message on to David? Did it mean that he had done enough in the Simeon way or what? Very fast answer came back, no, not in that sense at all.

So I prayed about this situation and wondered what on earth to do. Talked it over with the members of the family and the consensus was that it was a message from the Holy Spirit and however uncomfortable I felt passing on that message, it was what I had to do.

The next cell group meeting came along and the bible verses were read out and as I had feared, they were all most complimentary and some people had also found inspiring pictures to put behind their verses. As we progressed round the room, I began to feel more and more uncomfortable with what I had to say. I turned to David and said, "I don't know how to tell you this, but the message I have for you is 'You have done enough.'" Stunned silence, then grateful thanks. Apparently my strange message was an answer to the situation that David had been praying about. Each year for some time past he had been going out to Nepal with Soapbox on a summer work camp. This year he was not sure about going and had been praying about the situation. My message for him, was God's answer to both his prayer and mine.

Since that time we have lived with the definite knowledge that God does talk to us and answer prayers. It is a wonderful feeling to receive a Word from God and for that Word to be an answer to prayer for a friend. By the way that meeting was a good sixteen years ago and David is still with us, so it was definitely not an answer to Simeon's prayer.



# HOLY HABITS

## PRAYER 4

### **Praying for the world**

## **ACTS 2:42-47**

**“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”**

# **SESSION 4**

## **PRAYING FOR THE WORLD**

### **INTRODUCTION**

What does the phrase praying for the world say to you? What does the sentence mean? The world is a very large place and there are millions of people out there, how can you hope to make a difference, or have any effect?

The answer is that in your own strength you won't, but with the Holy Spirit and God on your side along with all the other people of faith praying into the same situation you will have an influence, both in the field for which the prayer is meant and in the audience listening to your prayer.

We need to learn about the art of intercession from Jesus and define the situation for which we are praying and then addressing God in all His sovereignty, His power and glory.

Intercession means “the act (or an instance) of interceding or offering a petitionary prayer requesting a specific action to God (or a higher authority) on behalf of others.

## FORMING THE HABIT

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human,”

1 Timothy 2:2-6<sup>(a)</sup>

Jesus is our greatest role model for life, so we need to be close to him, our rabbi, to benefit from his teaching, care, challenge and encouragement. We need to follow in His footsteps and try to do what He did, however inadequately. We do this through regular prayer, Bible study, time spent with him and living out of his values in the world. This is why we need to pray for the world because Jesus did. Jesus prayed to His Father everyday and much of that time He prayed for the world and everybody in it including the seemingly unworthy.

*(adapted from URC Daily Devotions 14/04/2018)*

We need to pray for the world because Jesus did so and we should do as Jesus did (see Romans 15:1-9). Jesus also instructed us to love our neighbours as ourselves (see Matthew 22:39). Paul also confirmed that we should intercede for everyone including kings and those in high authority in the passage above from 1 Timothy.

This makes it our duty to pray for the rest of the world, which means everybody outside our community, not just our friends and close neighbours whom we know by name. “Paul prayed for his friends and relatives, of course; we know that from things he said over and over again. But in this passage he strongly urges that we should start, as it were, at the other end. We should pray for the people who hold the world together by their rule, leadership and authority.”

*(New Testament PRAYER for Everyone Tom Wright page 21)*

1) When you are asked to pray for someone, how do you decide what to ask for?

2) Have you ever gone through a time when lots of people were praying for you? What difference did it make to you?

Our prayer needs to be God centred and to re-orientate and establish us in right relationships with God, those we love and the world God cares for.....Adoration.....Confession.....Thanksgiving.....as we take time with these we are re-oriented to and transformed by, the love and holiness of God. So when we come to Intercession we will be able to pray in a way consistent with the teaching of Jesus for the fruits of God's Kingdom to be seen and known in the lives of those for whom we pray.  
*(adapted from Holy Habits Andrew Roberts page 154)*

3) How do we pray for those we don't know personally?

Read Romans 13:1-7, Romans 10:11-14

4) When and why might you pray for those in position of power and authority

We need to pray for the world because Jesus did so and we should do as Jesus did (see Romans 15:1-9). Jesus also instructed us to love our neighbours as ourselves ( see Matthew 22:39). Paul confirmed that we should intercede for everyone including kings and those in high authority. Everyone needs to include our enemies because God treats evil and good alike, for example, He sends rain on both righteous and unrighteous (see Matthew 5:43-45).

This is taught in one of the most important collections of Jesus' teaching. Matthew is the teaching gospel writer and he collects the teaching of Jesus under certain great headings. The Sermon on the Mount is not one sermon, it is a summary of His consistent teaching to the disciples. The statement 'seeing the crowds Jesus went up on the mountain and *when he sat down* .....he opened His mouth and taught them.' Jesus was a rabbi and when a rabbi sat to teach, that teaching is central and official. The phrase "he opened his mouth" is only used for serious

teaching / sayings.

*(adapted from Matthew Vol 1 William Barclay page 86)*

The import of this setting, is that whatever was included in this collection of teaching is fundamental to the way we should live. Teaching about being the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” therefore should be central to the way we live and pray. If these are the roles that Christians should adopt, then praying for the world should be included in that remit even though we do not personally know those for whom we pray, we can pray for them and the one who created them and expect that our prayers should be answered according to Matthew 18:19-20. “Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.” But, remember that answer will be what God in His wisdom and His love knows to be best.

*(Matthew Vol 2 William Barclay page 191).*

It is the consistent and official teaching of the Christian Church that obedience must be given to and prayers made for the civil power even when the wielder of that power was a Nero. *(Romans William Barclay page 122)* So even though the individual leader may be difficult to pray for, you need to pray for that which is good from the work they provide, such as a range of services. A Christian is honour bound to be a good citizen and to take part in all the duties of citizenship. This is of course easier in the western world where in the late 20C and early 21C have never known war or major civil disturbance.

5) How would you pray for the rulers and leaders of countries undergoing civil unrest?

The call to prayer is also the call to think clearly about God and the world, and God’s project for the whole human race. Try praying for your rulers and watch not only what God will do in your society but also how your own attitudes will grow, change and mature.

*(New Testament PRAYER for Everyone—Tom Wright page 24)*

## PRAYERS FOR A CHURCH SERVICE

As part of our journey 'Walking the Way' we want to put the Holy Habits into practice. With Prayer, the idea is that each of the Groups in the church should take a turn at leading a set of prayers in any way you choose.

Your prayers can be presented in any way you choose according to your gifts—speaking, singing, acting, miming, pictorially, a video, giving a presentation, playing some music or any other idea which may or may not include the congregation at large. You could create a PowerPoint presentation to accompany your prayer with relevant pictures. For special times such as Christmas, Easter or Pentecost, take a prayerful hymn or song and illustrate it with pictures and bible verses to emphasise the words of the song.

Can any of your group pray or sing in tongues? If so let them do so as long as you have an interpreter at hand so that everybody knows what is happening.

If a member of your group can pray or sing in another language please share with us. We can understand what is happening with an English translation on the screen.

Find out what is going on in your local community from councillors, local press, local shops or community organisations. Identify people, groups or events that need Prayer and set aside time regularly to do this. Take this further by putting together a prayer diary and sending text, email, or printed updates to each other. *(Holy Habits Prayer page 41)*

Where the world is undergoing mixed trauma a good place to start is with Psalm 13 as shown on the Christian Aid website

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I bear pain in my soul,

and have sorrow in my heart all day long?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,  
and my enemy will say, 'I have prevailed';

my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.



But I trusted in your steadfast love;  
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.  
I will sing to the Lord,  
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

### **Christian Aid version of Psalm 13**

How long, O Lord,  
can we hide our faces from the headlines of violence and tragedy?  
How long, O Lord,  
will communities in Myanmar be displaced by conflict?  
How long, O Lord,  
will the children of the Caribbean be battered by hurricanes?  
How long, O Lord,  
will the people of Mexico live with threat of tsunami from earthquakes?  
How long, O Lord,  
will South Asia experience devastating floods?  
How long, O Lord,  
must the soul of humanity bear the pain of trauma and loss,  
and have sorrow in its heart all day long?

Consider and answer us, O Lord our God!  
Give protection to all those living in fear of death.  
Give strength to endure so tragedy will not prevail.  
Give guidance to decision makers who are on the ground.  
Give compassion to hearts weary with fatigue.

We trust in your steadfast love,  
our hearts will rejoice in your salvation,  
as we participate in your kingdom restoration praying,  
acting and giving bountifully  
with all those preparing and repairing  
what violence, hurricane, earthquake and flood is destroying.

How long, O Lord,  
will we bring our prayers of lament to you?  
In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord we pray.  
Amen.

*(taken from the Christian Aid website)*



# **HOLY HABITS**

## **PRAYER 5**

### **Praying with the Psalms**

## **ACTS 2:42-47**

**“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”**

# **SESSION 5**

## **PRAYING WITH THE PSALMS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

**“Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

**Ephesians 5:18-20**

We all find it difficult to pray at times. Sometimes words fail us. But the Bible provides us with a ready-made prayer and song-book that has been used by countless generations. It’s called The Psalms. Be encouraged to dip into it. Accept it for what it is - a mixture of joy and pain. And use it to guide your own prayers.

What the Psalms show us is that we don't have to pretend with God, that it's ok to bear our souls, to pour out our hearts, whether that be in joy and celebration, anger and frustration, despair and hopelessness. God wants to receive how we are feeling and share in it with us. We do not worship a God who expects us to put on a pretence before we come before him, we worship a God who understands what human life is like

and wants to share every part of it with us.

The Psalms are just as relevant today as when they were written, from the time of Moses, to the time of Christ. In fact the Book of Psalms is mentioned in St Luke's Gospel:-

“ For David himself says in the book of Psalms,  
“The Lord said to my Lord,  
‘Sit at my right hand,  
until I make your enemies your footstool.’” Luke 20:42

and also

‘Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Luke 24:44.

The same author also makes reference to the Book of Psalms in Acts 1 when the replacement disciple for Judas was selected

‘For it is written in the book of Psalms,  
“Let his homestead become desolate,  
and let there be no one to live in it”; and  
“Let another take his position of overseer.”” Acts 1:20

showing the importance of the Book of Psalms in the culture of the day.

Paul references the Psalms in Ephesians as above and Colossians:-

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Colossians 3:16-17

## **FORMING THE HABIT**

“The Psalter is the prayer book of Jesus Christ in the truest sense of the word. He prayed the Psalter and now it has become his prayer for all time...we understand how the Psalter can be prayer to God and yet God's own Word, precisely because here we encounter the praying Christ...because those who pray the psalms are joining in with the prayer of Jesus Christ, their prayer reaches the ears of God. Christ has become their intercessor. “ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

## The Nature of the Psalms

The book of Psalms with its collection of praises and prayers is a book of teaching on prayer and worship which is divided into five books. Before each of the five books, starting at Psalm 1, then 42, 73, 90, and 107 are the headings Book One and so on. Then at the end of Psalms 41, 72, 89, 106 and 150 are some blessings, amens and hallelujahs to end the book. *(Adapted from An Introduction to the Old Testament John Goldingay page 288)*

Although the Psalms are poetry they still have an important part to play in our education.

The Psalms are personal prayers to God written in different circumstances with different aims. They are personal prayers in the form of poetry written by a variety of people; peasants, kings, professional musicians, or rank amateurs in wildly fluctuating moods. *(adapted from The Bible Jesus Read Philip Yancey page 112)*

This concept is elaborated by John Goldingay in his book Psalms for Everyone. He shows four ways of speaking to God that also correspond to ways in which we speak to each other. Firstly we say to each other "You're great", but in Psalm 8 the compliment is phrased:- "O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!". We often say "Help" to each other when in need, in Psalm 18 it is phrased "In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help.

From his temple he heard my voice,  
and my cry to him reached his ears." or in Psalm 22:-  
"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?"  
and "But you, O Lord, do not be far away!  
O my help, come quickly to my aid! "

In Psalm 30 we find:-

"O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,  
and you have healed me. "

Another phrase we say to each other is, "I trust you"; to God it is phrased as "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." or

“ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me. “ in Psalm 23

When things have all been successfully concluded we say “thank you” as in Psalm 30:-

“Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones,  
and give thanks to his holy name. “ or  
“so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.  
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you for ever. “

These Psalms contain examples of words spoken to God rather than by God speaking to us.

The psalms are joyful prayers “sing for joy! Shout aloud!” they command. Musical instruments include cymbals, tambourines, trumpets, Rams’ horns, harps and lyres. Sometimes dancing erupted. The world in the psalmist’s imagination cannot contain the delights God inspires. A new song breaks out: “Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth, burst into jubilant song.” (98:4). Nature itself joins in “Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy.” (98:8)

*(adapted from The Bible Jesus Read Philip Yancey page 126-127)*

## **Types of Psalm**

There are different ways of defining the Psalms over half of which are Ascent, Thanksgiving, Salvation and Trust as well as Royal or Enthronement Psalms, Liturgical Psalms, Covenant Psalms and others.

### **Psalms of Praise or Thanksgiving**

The structure for psalms of praise or thanksgiving is as follows:-

1. Proclamation to praise God – I will praise
2. Report of deliverance
3. Praise
4. Descriptive praise

Read Psalms 95 and 100.

- 1) What do they have in common and how do they differ?
- 2) What do they tell us about worship?

### **Psalms of Prayer or Lament**

More than half of the Psalms are prayers, some express urgent and anxious protest and others have an attitude of hope and trust. Psalm 43 belongs closely to Psalm 42 as shown by the repetition of some phrases in Psalm 43 from 42. Psalm 43 is a psalm of lament and as such has the following elements in it:-

1. Address and introductory cry
2. The lament – the real problem
3. Confession of trust
4. Prayer – what the psalmist wants God to do about it
- 4a. Reasons for God to answer prayer
5. Vow or shout of praise
- 5a Prophetic statement

- 3) Read Psalm 43, can you fit it into the structure above?

### **Psalms of Trust**

Psalms of trust such as Psalms 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 63, or 121 all describe areas of trust in the Lord. Psalm 23 shows trust for refreshment, guidance, protection, and abundance. This oft-quoted Psalm is justifiably the most important Psalm of trust, the importance of integrity, God's shepherding care, God's guidance, God's goodness, and eternal security in his unfailing love. When we have all that we need, we can rest.

- 4) Read Psalm 23

Possibly the most well known of all the Psalms, this was written by David probably in later life looking back at his time as a shepherd in the first half of the Psalm before changing location. A Psalm just as relevant in the twenty-first century as in the first century and earlier. We think of Jesus as a divine shepherd looking after His flock in the safety of the green pastures so valuable in desert areas. In the second half of the



Psalm we are still protected from our enemies and well provided for life. The sentiments described are so comforting and appealing that many modern version of this Psalm have been written for us to sing today. Versions written by Baker and Crimond have been joined by those from Rutter and Townend.

Which type of Psalm do you classify this as and why?

## CONTEMPORARY PSALMS

The Psalms are a wonderful source of inspiration for modern song writers and allows many varied approaches to be taken. "Great Is the Lord" is a popular Christian worship song written in 1982 by Debbie and Michael W. Smith. The inspiration for the lyrics were drawn from Psalm 145:3, "Great is the Lord and most worthy of Praise".

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise  
The city of our God, the holy place  
The joy of the whole earth  
Great is the Lord in whom we have the victory  
He aids us against the enemy  
We bow down on our knees

And Lord, we want to lift Your name on high  
And Lord, we want to thank You  
For the works You've done in our lives  
And Lord, we trust in Your unfailing love  
For You alone are God eternal  
Throughout earth and heaven above

5) Could this song fit into one of the types of Psalm? If so, give your findings.

6) How could you use the Psalms in your prayer life more?

## RESOURCES

If you'd like some resources on the Psalms, you may find the following useful:-

The book Lucy mentioned in her sermon on the Psalms is by Eugene Peterson **Praying with the Psalms: A Year of Daily Prayers and Reflections on the Words of David.**

An excellent resource for anyone wanting to use the Psalms in Devotion and prayer is the book ***My Rock, My Refuge: A year of daily devotions in the Psalms*** by Tim Keller.

Also **Finding God in the Psalms: Sing, Pray, Live** by Tom Wright.

In music there is the band Sons of Korah - across the range of their CDs they have recorded beautiful renditions of all of the Psalms

[www.sonsofkorah.com](http://www.sonsofkorah.com)

Many songs written by other modern song writers such as Graham Kendrick, Stuart Townend, Tim Hughes, Matt Redmond and Robin Mark have also used the Psalms as their inspiration.





**HOLY HABITS**

**PRAYER 6**

**When I Can't Pray**

## **ACTS 2:42-47**

**“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”**

# **SESSION 6**

## **WHEN I CAN’T PRAY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

**“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.”**

**Romans 8:26**

When we feel unable to pray to God we are in a very unhappy, uncomfortable state of mind. In an earlier session we have discovered that prayer is nothing other than a conversation with our heavenly Father. We feel very unhappy and uncomfortable when unable to talk to someone close to us and most children of faith will try to rectify the situation as soon as possible. Likewise, if we feel there is a similar situation between ourselves and God, we will try our best to remedy the situation so that we can pray again.

There are two principal causes for being unable to pray. The first is to be out of relationship with God with a barrier between ourselves and Him caused by our sin. This situation requires us to acknowledge the situation and confess our sin. The second situation is when circumstances, by their nature, make us unable to put the words together to say what we mean to God. This session will look at the background to both circumstances and to try to put some answers together to solve the situation.

## **FORMING THE HABIT**

### **Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire**

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,  
Uttered or unexpressed,  
The motion of a hidden fire  
That trembles in the breast

\*\*\*\*\*

Nor prayer is made on earth alone:  
The Holy Spirit pleads,  
And Jesus at the Father's throne  
For sinners intercedes.

O thou by whom we come to God,  
The Life, the Truth, the Way!  
The path of prayer thyself hast trod;  
Lord, teach us how to pray

(First and last two verses)

Text: James Montgomery, 1771-1854

When the Revd. Edward Bickersteth had written his "Treatise on Prayer", he turned to newspaper editor James Montgomery to write a

hymn about prayer that he could use in his book.

Today, Revd. Bickersteth's volume has been forgotten, but the newspaperman's hymn is still being sung. This hymn is a theological definition in poetic form. What is prayer? Bickersteth may have said it more completely, but Montgomery defined it simply. (Montgomery later said he received more praise for this hymn than anything else he had written.)

### **Define the problem**

For various reasons, I don't feel able to pray. I can mouth platitudes, but not say what I really want to say. Either depressed or angry is one scenario, or out of sorts with God is the other.

### **What to try**

I believe there are two Biblical truths to acknowledge when we find ourselves unable to pray. One is to know that the Holy Spirit is interceding for us; He is our comforter and our interpreter. The Holy Spirit is on our side. The other is that if we can get to the point of pushing out some words to speak to our Father, no matter how jumbled or confused they are, He hears our prayer. Even if the words won't come at all, an anguished silent cry will still be heard and understood. God knows what is in our hearts and what we are trying to say.

When the words that you want, won't come, try using another route such as a reading from the Bible, you can try favourite readings such as Psalms 23 or 121 both of which give a picture of God looking after you and keeping you safe., especially if read out aloud. This may relax you so that some words will come to mind. At least you will be communicating with God even though not about the subjects on your mind. You could also use a concordance to check occurrences of a relevant word. Some verses may strike a chord and break the block enabling you to pray as you wish. The Psalms are a rich area from which to harvest for prayers of all varieties and can be used verbatim.



Psalm 3 begins:-

“O Lord, how many are my foes!  
Many are rising against me;  
many are saying to me,  
‘There is no help for you in God.’ Selah  
But you, O Lord, are a shield around me,  
my glory, and the one who lifts up my head.  
I cry aloud to the Lord,  
and he answers me from his holy hill. Selah”

*(The word “Selah” is a Hebrew word, the actual meaning being uncertain. It could just indicate a break in the singing or otherwise “forever”.)*

Psalm 4 begins:-

“Answer me when I call, O God of my right!  
You gave me room when I was in distress.  
Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.

.....

But know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself;  
the Lord hears when I call to him.”

Again this is a Psalm that can be read or said in many situations with some relevance. When you are unable to find or formulate the right words, using verses from the Bible can be a solution and a help.

Another reason for being unable to pray is being out of relationship with God and until what is wrong is put right, praying will be difficult. If something is wrong with our relationship with God we need to remedy the situation as quickly and sincerely as possible. If we are not sure of the cause we need to diagnose what it is and deal with it.

Read Romans 8:22-39

- 1) When have you found it hard to pray and what did you do in order to get through the block in order to pray?

- 2) Discuss the five arguments to show that we should have the confidence to pray always?
- 3) What encouragement can be given to people who are depressed by their faulty relationship with God?

Read Hebrews 4:15 -16

- 4) What words of comfort do you find here?

Read 1 Kings 19:1-5

- 5) Have you ever had a “broom tree” experience that you could share?” What took you there? Can you identify with any of the factors that frightened Elijah so much? Have you ever run away because you were afraid?

Read Luke 11:9 -11

Try to follow the instructions in the passage if you are finding it difficult to pray.

Hopefully these six sessions about prayer will help to define what Prayer is and help you to improve your prayer life. They contain some ideas for different ways to pray as a church, in a small group and as an individual. Have you ever thought through why you do not spend more time with God? What aspects of your time and commitment hold you back from prayer? Most of us do not have the kind of prayer life we should have, or would like to have. Hopefully reading about the Holy Habit of Prayer will help to remedy this.

Your “Prayer Life” is the time you spend communicating with God in prayer.

# GOOD PRAYER HABITS GOING FORWARD

## INTRODUCTION

Having read through these six sessions about Prayer, hopefully you have enough information to enrich and enliven your Prayer Life. Having studied what Prayer is and what can be done when things don't go right, the next stage is to go further with the habit.

## GOING FURTHER WITH THE HABIT

We need to enhance our lives with as much prayer as possible. Meetings will be more fruitful and amicable if wrapped in prayer, days will go more smoothly and calmly if started in prayer. Prayer underpins the whole of our lives and activities especially in three areas - praying as a church, praying in a House Group or small group in meetings and praying on your own.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS A CHURCH

These questions are all taken from the Holy Habits booklet for Prayer (page 44) and are all points that need to be considered by the whole church as well as any other areas in which the Church might act to refresh and enliven the communal prayer life.

- Is there a dedicated place for **Prayer** within your premises? If so how is this place used and how regularly is it refreshed?
- How does your church provide opportunities for members of the local community to pray? How and where do you pray for the community

- and in the community?
- Do you have regular meetings for **Prayer**? If so, do these need renewing in any way?
- Is **Prayer** always included in church meetings and, if so, is it done as a formality or is it considered an integral part of the meeting? Could more time be taken to pray in meetings and might **Prayer** be led in more varied and creative ways?
- Who prays intentionally for the church and its activities? Do you want to form a Prayer group/team to do this?
- How are **Prayer** needs shared? Do you have a Prayer Chain, for example?
- How are people of all ages involved in **Prayer**? How might the children be encouraged to take a lead in **Prayer**, for example?
- What proportion of the church budget is allocated to support the prayer life of the church?

Please look at these questions in your group and then pass any findings from these questions back to the Holy Habits Steering Committee as we will be most interested to receive them.

## **House and Small Group Activities**

Activities which might be considered by a House Group could include different ways of praying during the meeting as well as praying between meetings.

## **Prayer Dice**

Make prayer dice to direct your prayers and suggest subjects for prayer. Instructions can be found on the internet along with a pattern you can use. Write subjects for prayer on each side of the dice. Throw the dice in turn and pray about the subject you throw.

## **Paper Aeroplanes**

Make paper aeroplanes and write the name of somebody who needs prayer on the wing. Launch your plane across the room. Then pick up a plane landing near you and pray for the person named on the wing.

## **Prayer Consequences**

Give everybody a sheet of A4 paper and build prayers based on a structure of your choice such as:-

a name that addresses God;

something that God has done that you are thankful for ;

a promise of God;

a request for him to set something in motion;

a final request for patience as we wait.

prayer ending.

One line is written at a time, then the paper is folded over away from you and passed to a neighbour to write the next line. Once all the designated lines have been written, open the paper and read the prayer.

## **Prayer Labyrinth**

A labyrinth is a path which leads, via a circuitous route, to the centre of an intricate design and back out again. There is only one route within the Labyrinth and it is impossible to get lost within one.

A prayer labyrinth is used to facilitate prayer, meditation, spiritual transformation, and/or global unity. The most famous prayer labyrinths today

include an ancient one in the cathedral of Chartres, France, another in the cathedral of Duomo di Siena, Tuscany; and two maintained by Grace Cathedral, an Episcopal church in San Francisco. Walking the labyrinth has been shown to promote

- self-esteem
- attention and concentration
- sensitivity to areas of awareness, mystery and values
- calm and a feeling of well being
- a sense of valuing relationships with others
- the ability to reflect
- respect for the environment; and
- an awareness of ‘something bigger than ourselves’  
(God/ Creation)

One labyrinth design is as shown here and instructions can be found to help construct a temporary labyrinth for use inside or outside. This design can also be used for a finger labyrinth.

### **Praying with a Labyrinth**

To prepare yourself to pray with a labyrinth, be still and gently pray: “I place myself in your presence O Lord, my God.”

When you are ready... walk into the labyrinth or on a finger labyrinth slowly trace the path with a finger.

Use a finger on the hand that you do not write with, just let your thoughts come to the surface and let them flow, Jesus is with you every step of the way, you are never alone. You are always loved by God.

When you reach the centre, consider your thoughts, stay in the centre for a while and spend some time in prayer and reflection receiving God’s love and blessing.



When you are ready, return along the same path, return gratefully, prayerfully.

As you exit the labyrinth give thanks and praise to God:

“ Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit  
as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be  
world without end. Amen.

If you keep a prayer journal you may like to write down words, symbols or phrases to acknowledge and remember this time of prayer .

There is a Prayer Labyrinth in Cranleigh at St Joseph’s Specialist School and College. The labyrinth can be seen on the lower lawn at the front of the school and can be used by arrangement, by church groups and other interested organisations within Surrey for meditative walking, contemplative prayer and worship. St. Joseph’s offers a guiding service for the labyrinth, enabling the local community to make the most of a walk on the labyrinth. Walking the labyrinth is accessible to all, for those of a religious faith and those of none.

If you are interested in using the labyrinth please contact the school office.

### **Prayer Journal or Diary**

As part of each House Group meeting use a note book for a prayer journal or diary to keep a record of people or situations needing prayer. Between meetings pray into the recorded situations. Remember to give reports of any developments so that members are kept in touch with progress. This also gives you the opportunity to give thanks for answered prayers.

## **Individual Activities**

There are many interesting ways to enrich one’s individual prayer life from praying with a Prayer partner or group to using one of the many ideas to be found on the Methodist website at

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/prayer/creative-prayer/>.

On the URC website at

<https://www.urc.org.uk/our-work/walking-the-way.html>, you can find the resources for the Walking the Way programme including the link to use to subscribe to the URC Daily Devotions. There is also the information about the Holy Habits programme.

The internet is full of resources that can help us with our Prayer Life. [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) is one site which provides a number of Bible translations and other information. It has a very good concordance and helps greatly with searching the Bible for particular words or phrases.

There are many other daily devotional emails to subscribe to other than the one from the URC. A trustworthy one is that from the Scripture Union. There are many others available, but be careful and check the provenance of the providing site and the beliefs of the host Church.

These daily emails provide a passage from the Bible together with a reflection on the passage and maybe accompanied by a prayer.

If you can set aside a block of time you can go on a Retreat or attend Christian Festivals such as Spring Harvest, Greenbelt or New Life.

## **Practical Ideas to Help**

The following ideas are taken from a sermon given by our Minister Revd Lucy Brierley on “Forming Good Prayer Habits”. She spoke about the help that can be obtained from establishing a routine and the foundation this can give to your life.

These are the points of this programme.

### **Establish a routine**

Hard though it may seem try to make praying part of your morning routine along with brushing your teeth. John Perkins said “Prayer is the victory of mind over mattress.” Praying in the morning is a really good habit to establish, like pointing your satellite receiver towards God and saying “I am here.” Morning prayer can orient us in the right direction at the start of the day. It may not change the events of the day, but it may give us the strength to deal with them better.



## **Make it realistic**

Start with something small that you can maintain and build on later when the habit is more settled. Don't choose something unrealistic that becomes a millstone around your neck.

## **Find a space in your daily routine**

Even if you are always rushed in the morning try to find a few minutes in your routine. Maybe as soon as you wake up, while doing your teeth, waiting for the kettle to boil or during your journey to work. This is the time to point your satellite dish upwards and saying "God I'm here". Use this time to talk through the day about any subject you are anxious about and invite God into the situation. Ask for wisdom, grace, peace and energy.

## **Pray out loud**

Praying out loud makes your prayer seem like a conversation. It can seem rather odd to begin with but will become easier and is a good way to prepare for praying out loud within a group. In the car when you are on your own is a good place to start. If this seems too difficult try reading a passage from the Bible slowly. If you choose one of the Psalms, it is a good introduction to praying out loud. This also helps to keep your mind focussed.

## **Using the Bible**

If you can find more time during the day, maybe starting once or twice a week try to read some scripture and do some Bible study with a Bible guide. This can take you through a book or theme and help to focus your prayers as you do so.

## **Emails and Apps**

There are many mobile apps or daily email Bible readings and prayer notes that arrive on your mobile phone or laptop. Reading this daily devotional is a good way to start the day. This can also be obtained in printed format.

## **Find a special place to pray**

Finding a special place to pray may also help to establish your prayer habit. It can be a special chair or quiet spot in the house or garden

which you can use for prayer.

### **Pray with others**

Some people find it inspiring to pray with others, a trusted friend, prayer partner, someone you can text and pray with that way. There is no right or wrong way to pray..... It's what works for you.

### **Pray at the end of the day**

Another time we can find to pray is at the end of the day, to talk over the events of the day with God, giving thanks for things that went well and asking for help with unresolved matters.

### **Daily Examen**

The Ignatian or Jesuit practice of the Daily Examen is a format to review the day just gone.

**Ask God for light** - this is about opening ourselves to God's spirit as we look back on the day - seeing it with God's eyes.

**Give thanks** - being thankful, grateful is a really important part of being human

**Review the day** - methodically take time to go through the different parts of the day just gone, the people we met, the things we said, the situations we encountered. Think and pray about them as the Spirit leads.

**Face your shortcomings** - we give to God those situations in which we did not do our best - loss of temper, giving somebody the and ask for His forgiveness and renewal.

**Look towards the day to come** - put your hand in God's and go into the next day with Him at our side.

### **Journaling**

You can also keep a Prayer Journal for your personal prayers to God. This can be a specialised book, or you can use any suitable notebook. Write down your prayers and what you are praying for, noting down answers and those that remain on your list. Reviewing this list can give structure and narrative to your Prayer Life.

**“How to Pray”** by John Pritchard is a good book to take you forward. It is full of practical advice for establishing a rhythm of prayer in your life, in ways that make sense for you.

## **The Other Half of the Conversation**

Apart from speaking to God in prayer we also need to listen to Him in prayer as well. This takes preparation as you need to empty your mind of all other thoughts.

By far the harder part of the Prayer conversation with God is that where you are supposed to listen to what God is saying to you. This part can become obvious in a number of different ways. There is the “lightbulb” moment when something becomes blindingly obvious in response to a remark by somebody else. The “Why shouldn’t I ” or “that’s what to do” moment.

There is the nagging thought which keeps on coming into your mind about something or other — this can be God trying to get through. This is the thought that will not go away until you do something about it.

Then there is also the quick response which comes to mind when praying about a subject. If you do not feel confident about any of these responses actually being from God, it is a good idea to discuss them with another Christian to establish their provenance. Receiving a word from God is an amazing experience and should be treasured and obeyed.

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## CONNECTING THE HABITS

