

# GROW

## Prayer 1: Blessing Others



### Live

If someone says that they will ask God to bless you, what would you like that blessing to involve?



### Grow

**Read Ephesians 5: 15 – 23 and 3: 14 – 21**

1. What seems to be Paul's motive in praying for those he is writing to?
2. What themes run through Paul's prayers in the two passages?
3. When have you had a hard time knowing what to pray for someone?
4. What are some ways that you can use the Bible to help you pray in a specific way for people you know and for your church?
5. Paul reflects on the love of Christ in 3: 16 – 19 and prays that his readers will experience it profoundly. Why do we need people to pray that for us?
6. Paul clearly longed for the Christians in Ephesus to know God more deeply and prayed accordingly. How, specifically, can Paul's example help us to pray for those around us?
7. Does this passage help us to pray for past members of our church, e.g. those who have moved on or overseas students who have returned home or others we no longer have contact with.



### Live

Share any experiences where we have seen answers to prayer when praying for others.



### Love

Listen to a CD at the start or before prayer time. Possible songs:

- Blessed be your name
- Hear my prayer
- Abba Father
- What a friend we have in Jesus.

## Prayer

Pray for each other in 2's or 3's.

Ask God to teach you to pray with greater insight for others.

## **Leaders Notes:**

### **Group Discussion:**

The aim of this study is to get the group thinking about what they want most for people. Is our highest desire for non-Christians that they see Christ and know him? And for Christians, that they become more like Christ? If so, how do we pray for this?

### **Question 2**

If the group finds this a difficult question, the following structure may help to give you a basis to start from.

- Paul gives thanks for their faith (1: 15 – 16)
- Paul prays that the believers might fully experience what God has done for them. (1: 17 – 19)
- Paul prays for the strengthening of the believers (3: 16 – 17)
- Paul concentrates on the limitless love of God (3: 17 – 19)

## Prayer 2: Answered Prayer



### Live

Have you ever prayed for 'a car parking space' or that you 'won't run out of petrol' or that 'it won't rain'?

- Share experiences.



### Grow

Jerusalem, the location of the temple of God, was to the Old Testament believer the centre of their devotion (as it is for Jews today). Nehemiah, a Jew in exile, was senior official in the Persian royal court, strategically placed to be part of the answer to his prayer for the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

### Read: Nehemiah 1: 1 – 2:8

1. Based on what you know from the passage, how did Nehemiah's concerns and motives affect what and how he prayed?
2. The news that Nehemiah heard in 1: 2 – 3 drove him to definite action (see 1:4). What sort of news would drive you to pray with the same urgency?
3. Nehemiah 1:5 shows us the first stage of Nehemiah's prayer. How can focusing on God at the beginning of our prayers enable us to pray with more confidence?
4. Nehemiah's prayer then moves into repentance (1: 6 – 7) when he not only confesses his own sin but also his people's wrongdoing. Why, when praying about Jerusalem, might he have felt the need to repent personally as well as identify with the sin of others?
5. Nehemiah referred to God's promises and previous dealing with the children of Israel (1: 8 – 10) as part of his prayer. In what ways do your knowledge of God's actions and character affect the way you pray?
6. In 1: 11 – 2: 8 we see Nehemiah taking steps to tackle the problem of Jerusalem's walls being broken down (1:3). In light of the enormous human and practical odds Nehemiah was up against, what do you think gave him confidence to embark on the task God had given him to do?
7. How can Nehemiah's example help your prayer life? Can we be more regular in our prayer for rebuilding St James?



### Build

Do we tell others about the St James Restoration Project?

Do you have a vision for St James which you want to share?



## Love

Open or finish with CD revealing God's sovereignty. Possible songs:

- Holy, Holy
- The splendour of the King

## Prayer

As a group ask God to help you focus afresh on what He has revealed of Himself in the Bible and to use that in prayer.

As a group pray for the St James' Building Project, the finances, people, timings, resources etc.

## Leaders Notes:

### Question 1

"Like all his people, Nehemiah looked to Jerusalem as his heart's true home and the centre round which his life revolved." (John White, *Excellence in Leadership*)

Nehemiah's concern to see Jerusalem rebuilt and restored was not based on nationalism or political ambition. Rather, it was built on a desire to see true worship of his God at its heart, the temple, and on shame that Jerusalem had been humiliated in judgement because of the Israelites' idolatry, materialism and unbelief

### Question 4

Identification is an increasingly difficult concept for people who live in highly individualistic cultures to understand. Western cultures usually place high emphasis on individual responsibility – we blame others, not ourselves, for our nation's ills. In contrast, Nehemiah saw himself to be as responsible as the next person for his nation's troubles.

### Question 5

Intercessors frequently return to God's specific promises as a basis for prayer. You may want to explore how much group members use the Bible as part of their prayer lives and let it shape what they pray, as Nehemiah did.

### Question 6

Nehemiah would have drawn strength from the promises and character of God (1:5 – 10), the prayers of others (1:11), and possibly the human circumstances he found himself in (1:11) there may have been other factors, such as confidence that God had heard his prayer, but we cannot identify this from the text.

# GROW

## Prayer 3: Praying Together



### Live

Some Christians find praying together difficult; some find it enjoyable; what is your experience?



### Grow

When the early church prayed together, it grew.

#### Read: Acts 4: 23 - 31

1. Peter and John have just been released from prison by the religious authorities for preaching about Christ and performing a miracle. In what way(s) is the early church's response to such persecution surprising?
2. What does the passage teach us about the unity of the believers?
3. How can praying with other Christians build unity in the face of temptation or trial?
4. Look at the requests in verses 29 – 30. What do they teach us about the believers' priorities and attitudes?
5. Not all answers to prayers are dramatic, but the believers' prayer was clearly answered (v. 31). Sometimes we can be surprised by how God answers our prayers. Why do you think this is?
6. Verse 31 tells us that a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit enabled the church to be bold in its evangelism. How does this compare with what Christians often desire from their experience of the Holy Spirit?
7. What do you find difficult about praying with others?  
Can prayer ministry at St James be improved?



### Live

Share any experiences which reveal God's control over circumstances in your own life



### Love

Listen to a CD before ministry,  
Maybe play quietly during ministry any suitable worship songs or instruments.

### Prayer

Pray for each other in 2's if possible.  
As a group, pray for unity and boldness in prayer.

## **Leaders Notes:**

### **Question 2**

It is not clear from the passage precisely how the church prayed together; it would be difficult for them to pray an identical prayer together without having planned it first. It may have been that they prayed sentence by sentence following someone who led the prayer, or that the prayer recorded is a summary. Regardless of the way they prayed together, the critical point is that they prayed from the strength of their unity.

See also Act 4:32

### **Question 3**

It's particularly difficult to be dishonest in open prayer to God; to pray together demands genuine unity. It also cements the aims of the group if all pray together, longing for God to be at work.

### **Question 4**

The believers clearly did not lose sight of the overall mission God had for them; interestingly, they did not pray for their personal protection but instead for boldness in witness.

### **Question 5**

We can be surprised that God answers our prayers because sometimes deep within we don't actually believe he will or can! Here the dramatic way God answered was presumably a special indication of his power, to reassure the church. An earthquake was often understood in the Old Testament to indicate God's presence (Ex 19:18 & Is 6:4)

### **Question 6**

Our desire for an "experience" of God can be selfish. Rather than seeking God to be better equipped to serve him and witness to Christ, we may wish only to satisfy our own sense of spiritual well-being. The expression "filled with the Holy Spirit" may generate a debate as to what this means and why it occurs, and whether we should seek such experiences. Try to avoid getting into a complex discussion on this point. Whatever the experience of the believers in this situation, the net effect was a new empowerment for evangelism. This ties in precisely with the words of Jesus in Acts 1:8: "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." In experience-oriented cultures we may need to guard against wanting God simply to be only our source of personal spiritual experience and gratification, rather than seeking his gift of the Spirit to make us and the church more Christ-like and equip us to fulfil the Great Commission.

## Prayer 4: Praying with Confidence



### Live

Confidence is a vital factor in human relationships. Trusting in God should characterise our relationship with God. What sort of things hinder us from finding intimacy with God?



### Grow

Jesus responds to his disciple's request that He teaches them to pray.

**Read: Luke 11: 1 - 13**

1. What different aspects of prayer can you see within the model that Jesus gave his disciples in verses 2 - 4?
2. In what ways do the different aspects and emphasis in the prayer provide a model for your own prayer life?
3. Why do you think the friend overcomes his initial reluctance to help his neighbour (v: 5 – 8)?
4. The friend gives his neighbour “as much as he needs” in answer to his request (v: 8). what does this passage teach us about how and why our prayers are answered?
5. Luke 11: 9 – 10 considers the issue of persistence in prayer. What does it say that persistence in prayer involves?
6. In what ways does this passage help you to be more confident about prayer?
7. What practical steps do you need to take (individually or as a group) to develop your prayer life?



### Love

Commit yourself to becoming more persistent Luke 11: 9 – 10

You could text the following verse to the members of your group so they can pray it daily.

*“Dear God, help me to know that you long for me to communicate with you, and that it is your delight to lead me deeper into your love and purposes. Forgive me when I doubt that. Amen”*

Play any suitable CD to draw you into God's presence as each member prays silently for others in the group.

## Prayer

Re-read line by line the prayer in Luke 11: 2 – 4, pausing between each line to personalise it in some way. For example, after “Our Father” you might like to thank God that he has chosen

you to be his child. Or you could leave a pause at the end of each line for members of your group to pray.

Pray that as a group God will bring more and more confidence in prayer as you pray for others and claim God's promises.

## **Leaders Notes:**

### **Question 1**

The following is a brief analysis of the key points in the Lord's Prayer:

- "Father" implies intimacy with God, as a child would address his parent, enabling us to understand that we can talk to God with intimacy. Despite who he is, he is approachable and sees us as his children.
- "Hallowed" (NIV) means "made holy"; the phrase "hallowed by your name" means we should approach God with reverence, aware of his nature and character. Also, it suggests that God's name will be revered as holy by others if they see his character glimpsed in our lives.
- "Your kingdom come" means that in the present those who pray should long to see Christ's rule realised in our lives, and they long for the future reality that Christ will finally come and ensure that his will is perfectly done.
- The prayer moves in verse 3 from a focus on God's character and the outworking of his purposes to a prayer for the provision of our daily needs ("daily bread"), emphasising our continual dependence on God. This discourages us from being arrogantly self-reliant or forgetful of his constant provision.
- The final part of the prayer (v: 4) demonstrates that we can confidently approach a merciful god for forgiveness, and in being forgiven find the grace of God to forgive others.
- The closing request, "And lead us not into temptation" (NIV) does not mean that we ask God not to tempt us, for he does not tempt us to sin (Jas 1: 13). Instead it implies that in our weakness we come to God, recognising the temptation around us, to ask that we might be able to resist the temptations we face and so lead a holy life.

### **Question 3**

To provide food and hospitality to a visitor was expected practice in Jesus' culture. The friend probably lived in a one-room house, so to get up to provide the bread would have awakened the family. Because the first friend persists in asking, thereby demonstrating the seriousness of his need for bread, his request is answered.

### **Question 4**

How prayers are answered is a complicated subject. The following may be helpful background information.

As with the parable of the widow in Luke 18, God is not being likened to a grudging friend, an unkind father or an unjust judge in the way that he answers our prayers. The parable says effectively, "If a human is like this, think how much kinder God is."

God responds to prayer not because he has to be pushed into it but because he wants to give to us and to use us in accordance with his will.



### Question 5

Note that the words ***ask, seek and knock*** are continuous tenses, that is, they imply ***constantly*** asking, seeking and knocking. Also, the three words imply degrees of intensity. First you ask, then you seek, then you knock. The underlying issue is similar to that in verses 5 – 8: if we really seek God's will and want to see our prayer answered in line with his will, we should constantly pray.

### Question 6

Prayer often involves spiritual warfare. Because of the importance of prayer in our relationship with God, Satan will do his best to undermine individual and group prayer. Group members can do practical things to help each other pray, for example, by meeting one-to-one with another person in the group to pray regularly.