

F E B R U A R Y 2 0 1 4

the **Training  
Event!**

# Prayer

A workshop for leading public prayer

## Leading the Congregation in Prayer

### PART ONE ... Some Reflections on Prayer

*"If you are in any form of spiritual leadership, work at your public prayers."*

*Don Carson: A call to spiritual reformation.*

#### **What is prayer?**

As we pray, we are practising fellowship with God on earth! He made us, and having redeemed us for fellowship with himself, he has given us the indescribable privilege of prayer. This requires a big statement! And here it is -

Of all human activity, prayer is the single most nourishing, enlivening act in which we could possibly engage! Listen to David (Ps 22) - in *deep* distress before God - "*O Lord, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me. Deliver my precious life from the power of the dogs.*" This heartfelt outpouring brought renewal and hope to David. Prayer is a game changer. But there's *so much more* to prayer than that!

Best of all, is the fact that *it was God who first spoke to us*. It was he who set up the framework and initiated the conversation, and our prayers, indeed our whole lives, are actually our *response* to his first, gracious word to us. So *our prayers spring from our relationship with God*.

#### **Biblical prayer**

Some blessings come to us only through prayer and if we want such blessings, we'll pray according to God's will, his character and purposes. *The way to move towards that, is to tie all our prayers as closely as possible to Scripture. Scripture is God's territory!* It's there that we meet him intimately and powerfully; it's there that he teaches us how to pray faithfully, in ways that honour him. In Scripture's light, and by its example, we'll be helped to think through what it is God wants us to ask for.

Sometimes, we'll be off the mark in our prayers, but God sees our trusting heart, & his Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf.

#### **Leading prayer**

When leading group prayer, we're not praying as individuals. The prayer is to be the prayer of God's people, gathered before their King. Ours is merely the voice that carries the prayer. So the appropriate words to use are - 'we pray' (not 'I pray'.)

Something else to remember about public prayer: *Public prayer is addressed to God while others are overhearing it*. Jesus models such prayer for us (Jn11:41-42). At the tomb of Lazarus, after the stone has been removed, Jesus looks to heaven & prays, "*Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me*". So when we lead group prayer we have the opportunity, and the responsibility, to instruct or encourage those who hear the prayer.

As we plan our prayer in advance, even though it will be directed and addressed whole-heartedly to God, we'll need to reflect on *what our prayer is saying to the people who hear us*.

#### **What shall we pray?**

Christ gave us our gifts (Eph 4:11-13) "*to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up*". So the aim of our prayer ministry is to help build the body of Christ!

That means praying for those things *God* wants us to pray for. Which takes us straight back to the clarity of scripture and the need to let it shape our prayer!

The Bible shows us three broad categories for prayer, as shown below. Included are a few possible prayer topics within each category. The Bible is full of things we should pray for, choices have to be made, and there is wisdom in not over-burdening a single prayer. There is always a further prayer opportunity!

#### *God Himself*

- In worship, listing his attributes
- In praise and thanksgiving (eg the Psalms)

#### *Ourselves (that is, God's people)*

- Our sorrow for sin and our need of our Saviour
- Thanksgiving for benefits received
- Those who suffer (James 5:13-16)
- Persecuted believers (Luke 18:1-8; 2Cor 1:8-11; Phil 1:19)
- News from our link missionaries
- Our growth under God as his people (Eph 1:15-21)

#### *The people in God's world*

- Spread of gospel (2Thess 3:1; Matt 9:36-38; Col 4:2-4; Eph 6:18-19)
- For all those in authority (1Tim 2:1-4)
- Appropriate social issues, avoiding contentious statements

### **How shall we pray?**

*Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker (Ps 95:6)*

Standing, sitting, kneeling, whatever our physical approach, we pray with worshiping hearts. Let Paul's prayers in his Letters be our inspiration. They are alight with the Holy Spirit, as Paul kneels before his Heavenly Father, seeking *his* glory. This is the way to go!

As well as a worshiping heart, let's pray with *confidence* in our delivery on behalf of the congregation! Biblical prayers are based on God's wisdom, & we'll never speak a more worthwhile word than the Spirit-led word of God. So let's speak it out with *conviction*!

## **PART TWO ... Hands On!**

Here we look at the way one prayer leader prepares a congregational prayer ...

**Q 1: *What is your starting point, and where do you go from there?***

**A:** I start with prayer. I need the Holy Spirit's guidance. I find it very hard work and it takes me a few hours each time to get it done.

I generally use 750-850 words. If the prayer is too long, the congregation can lose track. I spend time preparing, using Scripture and notes from personal devotions to help with ideas and ways of expressing them, and I try to use words whose meaning is clear.

I work at getting a natural flow of ideas, and remind myself to leave room for the unexpected, such as the last-minute prayer request on a Sunday.

I write down the prayer, and space the sentences in ways that help my expression as I lead the congregation.

**Q 2: Show us some examples of using passages from the Bible to construct your prayers.**

**A:** My prayers **begin** by praising God for who he is and for what he has done. Psalms are a good basis for this. For instance, Psalm 105:1-4 can be re-worded for a modern congregation in ways that retain the power of the original, while using words that are readily understood, and appropriate.

Psalm 105:1-4:

*"Give praise to the LORD, proclaim his name; Make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; Tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; Let the heart of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Look to the LORD and his strength; Seek his face always."*

Re-worded:

Almighty God and merciful Father,  
This morning we give thanks to you, calling upon your name.  
We sing your praises, telling of all your wonderful deeds.  
We glory in your holy name.  
We seek your presence Lord, and look to your strength. We rejoice in you.  
We praise you for your love, your power, your mercy, and your compassion.

Usually, I like to **close** my prayer with something based on a passage from the New Testament. An example:

Colossians 2:2,6,7

*"My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ ... So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."*

Re-worded:

May we be encouraged in heart and united in love. Just as we received Christ, may we continue to live in Him,  
Rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as we overflow with thankfulness.

**Q 3: What about the main body of your prayer? How do you decide what things to pray for?**

**A:** I keep aware of the current sermon series and of the need to pray for our church leaders and helpers, as well as our formal ministries; these include Kids' church, youth, Ministry of Game, Bible study groups, English classes and the craft group.  
Using scripture, I pray for the world – for justice, peace, wisdom, and comfort; for good governments; for an end to war and poverty, and for effective response to disaster.

Still using scripture, I pray similarly for Australia, and for our Waitara and Hornsby community. I use the newsletter and my own observations or contacts to keep up with needs within the congregation. These include our spiritual growth; sickness and suffering; outreach; and special occasions.

Be sensitive to the fact that some people may not want their names mentioned in public prayer. It is ok to use names already mentioned in the weekly newsletter and if people specifically ask for prayer.

**Q 4: *Could you share some of your complete prayers – beginning, middle, and end, showing us how you spaced the sentences to help your expression?***

**A:** Here are two complete prayers. You see at the foot of each prayer the reminder I give myself when I pray upfront, to follow my own prayer with the Lord's Prayer ... or not, as required!

**Prayer 1** (approx. 690 words)

### ***Prayer 21 July 2013***

*Almighty, ever-living God of truth, eternal Father, creator of heaven and earth, sustainer of all things, source of all life, order and wisdom - we bring all glory, honour, praise and thanksgiving to You this morning.*

*You, O Lord, are a fountain of grace and truth, wisdom and goodness, justice, mercy and loving kindness. Thank you for revealing yourself to us and sending your Son into the world, to become a sacrifice for us.*

*We thank you, O God, for gathering your church, for guarding the ministry of your Word, for granting your Holy Spirit. You have poured out on us every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

*We thank you that we can bring our needs before you and that you hear our prayers.*

*Thank you for the many opportunities we have to hear and read your living word, to freely worship and serve you. May we always use them to add to our knowledge and faith.*

*Many throughout the world do not have this freedom and are persecuted for their faith. We pray for them. Strengthen and empower them, equip them to share the gospel.*

*We daily hear of many places in the world where there is constant warfare and trouble. Bring peace to these areas we ask. May those governing rule with integrity. May your justice and mercy prevail.*

*We pray for our own government too. Many difficult decisions are made daily to balance the needs and wishes of the nation. Give the men and women who hold office the fortitude to stay true to their calling and not be swayed by a desire for personal power, especially with the upcoming federal elections.*

*With other Anglican churches in Sydney we pray for the election of a new archbishop next month.*

*We ask for wisdom and a reliance on your guidance by those who are called to make this decision.*

*May the man chosen be a man after your own heart who faithfully and willingly serves your church. Give him strength and discernment in all he does.*

*We thank you for Theological Colleges, where men and women are being trained to serve you in our churches, in the community and mission fields. We pray that they will continue to be faithful to your word and that we as a church will support their work through our prayers and giving.*

*Here at Waitara we pray for Bruce and for all those leading, teaching and serving in various ways. We ask that you will be with those entrusted with planning for our future growth and outreach. May your Spirit direct their vision and decisions. Whatever we do may we always seek your glory and kingdom, and trust in your provision.*

*We pray that each member of our congregation will grow spiritually and will encourage others through our love, words and actions.*

*Help us to not only love and care for each other but reach out to people in need.*

*During this winter we pray for those who are homeless and those struggling to keep warm and provide enough food for their families. May we who have so much show compassion as Jesus did and give generously when opportunities arise.*

*We commend to your fatherly goodness those who are sick, particularly those suffering from long term illnesses. Give them strength and healing. Help them to persevere and surround them with your presence and love*

*We ask that You be with the lonely. Comfort those grieving. Grant hope and your peace to the discouraged and those struggling with difficulties in their life.*

*May we be sensitive to their needs and minister to them in your name.*

*We pray that our love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that we may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the coming day of Christ; that we will be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to bring glory and praise to You.*

*May we be filled with the Spirit, always giving thanks to You, our Father, for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Amen.*

*LORDS PRAYER?*

**Prayer 2** (approx. 750 words)

***Prayer 15<sup>th</sup> December 2013***

*Almighty God and merciful Father,*

*This morning we give thanks to you, calling upon your name.*

*We sing Your praises, telling of all your wonderful deeds.*

*We glory in your holy name.*

*We seek your presence Lord, and look to your strength. We rejoice in You.  
We praise you for your love, your power, your mercy, and your compassion.*

*In this Christmas season may we use every opportunity to tell everyone about you, that you are good and you do good things.*

*We thank you for your goodness and unfailing love to us, and to all people. You created this world for us; you sustain it minute by minute. You love us and provide for our every need.*

*Above all You sent Your son Jesus to become a man and live among us. Eternal life is in Him and that life gives the light to all mankind. He is full of grace and truth. Through Jesus we see your glory. Because he died for our sins and rose again we can have eternal life with you and be your children.*

*We thank you for the Holy Spirit, the Comforter; for your church; for the lives of all faithful servants of Christ and for the hope of the life to come. Help us to treasure in our hearts all that Jesus has done for us and help us to show our thankfulness by lives that are given wholly to your service.*

*We pray for our congregation and our ministries. We pray for Bruce and the ministry team. We thank you for their faithful service in the tasks you have given them. Grant them endurance to run the race well and keep their eyes on you.*

*Be with all who lead and serve in many areas of our church life. Give them the strength and energy to continue to do your work in your power.*

*Please bless each of the groups which meet to study your word and fellowship together. May they be places where we learn more about You and your will for us, and be places where we encourage each other in our daily walk.*

*We pray for our Carols service this evening. We pray the Holy Spirit will open the hearts of those coming to hear the gospel message. May each of us drink in again the wonder of Jesus coming to earth. Help us to be warmly welcoming to all who come. Give them a time of fellowship and fun. We pray that the weather will remain dry for the activities planned.*

*We pray for the church worldwide as it celebrates Christ's birth and brings the good news to all people.*

*Especially be with those who work in the mission fields. Bless them and their families. Direct their steps, grant them wisdom and reliance on your provision. Make their work be fruitful. Your grace is sufficient for their every need.*

*We continue to pray for the relief work being carried out in the Philippines after the devastating hurricane. Let wise decisions be made and effective use made of the resources and money that have been given. We also pray for those striving to rebuild their lives after the bushfires in October. May Your people be a light to those around, both in acts of compassion and service and in sharing the comfort that Jesus brings to all mankind.*

*We know how fragile life is. We truly are like "grass that withers and flowers that fall," but we rejoice that you and your word stand forever.*

*We pray for the sick and suffering. Please be their strength. Grant them relief according to their needs,*

*(We pause a moment to pray silently for those we know who are suffering in body, mind or circumstances)*

*Lord, we commend those we have prayed for to your fatherly goodness. Shower them with blessings and fill them with your great peace.*

*In times of trial and in times of feeling alone may we keep a deep and abiding trust in you, always remembering that your love for us is unfailing and never ceases.*

*We stand on the threshold of eternal life with You. You are our reason for being. May we remain steadfast in our faith, true to your word and may we show your love to all.*

*Use us to bring light to this dark world.*

*Use us to bring life to a struggling world.*

*Use us to bring joy to a despairing world.*

*Use us, please, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.      LORD'S PRAYER?*

**Q 5: Turning to the practical aspects of actually being upfront and leading, how can we do it best, within the context of serving our congregation and honouring God?**

**A:** Move to the microphone as the previous speaker departs. This can mean standing quietly to one side for a moment as the speaker finishes. A prompt handover shows eagerness to serve, and avoids any awkward unexplained pause.

As for the prayer, it **must** be audible! Aim your voice at the back row and slow your speech, because volume and pace affect audibility for lots of people. Too soft or too fast mean some people won't be able to hear the prayer. The microphone is a support, but you still need to project your voice.

A further point about microphone use is that it can distort sound if you are too close to it. Sound distortion (think of the letter P!) can be a distraction, so keep back a little from the microphone.

**Q 6: In addition to scripture and notes from personal devotions, are there other resources you use?**

**A:** Two books I have found helpful are **The Valley of Vision (Arthur Bennett)**, listing Puritan prayers and devotions, and **Kenneth Boa's Simple Prayers**.

As well, useful guidelines and good sample prayers are available on the internet. You'll find the sites and other references listed below under **Resources**.

If you use the online sample prayers, make sure to put them in your own words as much as possible, and make them relevant to our church. Some, I find, have a tendency to preach which I don't think is appropriate in a congregational prayer.

### **PART THREE – Resources**

#### ***Resources specific to prayer:***

<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2010/03/19/thirteen-tips-for-leading-the-congregation-in-prayer/> *Advice and comment. Very helpful and practical.*

<http://www.graceurctorrance.org/Prayers.html> *Sample prayers. Some tendency to preach. If using these prayers, make sure to put them in your own words as much as possible.*

Arthur Bennett (ed.): *The Valley of Vision*. A collection of Puritan prayers and devotions.

Kenneth Boa: *Simple Prayers: A daybook of conversations with God*

Common Prayer. (Sydney Diocese.) See pages 69-87. *Prayers for all sorts of needs and occasions*. Copies are in the cupboard outside Bruce's office.

#### ***General background resource:***

*Here are two books that fire the heart. In drawing us closer to the One to whom we pray, these writings help us pray more fittingly.*

J.I. Packer: *Knowing God*.

D.A. Carson: *A call to spiritual reformation*.