

# Prayer – a Lenten Study



## Session 5. Pray like this

### Read these Quotations

*“When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.”* Henri Nouwen “Out of Solitude”

*“The prayer of little faith makes us cling to the concrete circumstances of the present situation in order to win a certain security. The prayer of little faith is filled with wishes which beg for immediate fulfilment. This kind of prayer has a Santa Claus naivete about it and wants the direct satisfaction of very specific wishes and desires. When this prayer is not heard, that is, when we don’t get the presents we wanted, there is disappointment, even hard feelings and bitterness. With this prayer of little faith, the concreteness of the wishes eliminates the possibility for hope. People of little faith pray like children who want a present from Santa Claus but who are so frightened of the ‘Holy Man’ that they run away as soon as they have their hands on their package. They would rather have nothing more to do with the old bearded gentleman than getting his gift. All the attention is on the gift and none on the one who gives it.”* Henri Nouwen “With Open Hands”

\*\*With the person next to you, discuss what they mean to you and the extent to which they resonate with the way you think about prayer.

## Readings

**Mark 1:21-39, Psalm 40, Matthew 11:25-30**

## **Relationship between prayer and mission in Jesus' life**

Perhaps the greatest argument for praying is that Jesus Himself prayed. His close relationship with God, His Father, is clearly expressed in His prayer. We are brought into that bond by the gift of the Holy Spirit: "*God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'*" (Galatians 4:6). We can therefore learn much through learning more about how Jesus prayed. Some examples are: Mark 1:35, Luke 3:21, Luke 6:12.

### **1) The end of a long Day**

Read Mark 1:21-39 again. This describes a long and very busy day for Jesus. As you read, imagine that you are there with Jesus and try to really enter into the vivid picture that Mark paints. All day Jesus teaches and challenges His hearers. At last Peter takes Him home with him for a meal, but Peter's mother-in-law is ill and Jesus cures her fever. By sunset Jesus is inundated with requests for help: "*the whole city was gathered around the door*". How would you feel at the end of such a day? The one thing that He badly needs is sleep. But He needs something else even more; He wants to become still, to be aware and be absorbed by the presence of the indwelling God. In the early morning He slips away to pay full attention to His Father, undisturbed. This 'recharges' His for another day's ministry.

### **2) Readiness to serve – prayer and action**

Jesus' readiness to serve is summed up in Hebrews 10:7 "*See, God, I have come to do your will, O God*". In that chapter, Christ is said to pray in the words of Psalm 40 (just one of the Psalms that Jesus is quoted using in His prayer - how many others can you find?). Remember back to session 1 when we said that prayer was a response to the Divine initiative

– a response with our whole lives , not just words. In practice, if we build up a loving relationship with God in prayer it will spill over into all we do. Take a look at Luke 3:21:22, where Luke describes Jesus baptism and emphasises that afterwards Jesus prays and it is then that the voice comes from Heaven “*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*” Time and again we see Jesus praying either as above, after doing something, or before doing something (e.g. selecting His Apostles – Luke 6:12-13). This is all about aligning His actions with the will of His Father.

### **3) Affective prayer**

Prayer is raising mind and heart to God. The problem is that often we raise our minds but not our hearts. But prayer is ultimately about love not insight. It’s meant to establish friendship and friendship isn’t as much about having insight into another’s life as it is of mutually reaching each other in affection and understanding. An example of Jesus in affective prayer is: Matthew 11: 25-30. Jesus exults: “*I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth*”. This is prompted by His delight in God’s way of overturning how the world assigns importance to people. When God becomes central to our lives, we are in conversation with Him, whatever we are doing and not just in those times of explicit ‘handing over’ that we think of as ‘prayer-time’. Handing over, as an instinctive response to the events of daily life leads to spontaneous prayer when this go well and also in times of trouble. This leads to ‘handing over’ of ourselves in mission.

### **4) Prayer and Action in the lead up to the Passion**

The whole of Chapter 17 of John’s Gospel is a prayer, often referred to as ‘The Farewell Discourse’, ‘The High Priestly Prayer’ or ‘The Great Intercessory Prayer’. In it Jesus accepts His ultimate mission “*Father the hour has come*”. He offers all that he has done to the Father and asks that His Disciples are given what they need to continue His mission. We can learn a lot about prayer from this Chapter.

**\*\*With the person next to you, discuss the Scripture passages and ideas described above and the extent to which they resonate with your understanding of God and experience of prayer.**

## Summary

Hebrews 5. 7-9 sums up the relationship between a) prayer, b) day-to-day living and c) the Kingdom of God (highlighted in the passage)

*“In the days of his flesh, Jesus **offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.**”*

The passages below provide a useful resource for further reflection on prayer in the life of Jesus, as a model for deepening our relationship with God our Father.

### Jesus' teaching on prayer.

The clearest example of Jesus' teaching on prayer is given in the sermon on the mount:

**Matthew 6:5-8**; Sermon on the Mount: do not babble; pray in secret.

**Luke 11:1-4**; The Lord's Prayer.

### Jesus and public prayer

We can also learn from examples of Jesus praying in public, such as:

**Luke 17:11-17**; Jesus cleanses the 10 lepers Requirements for prayer: faith; forgiveness; recognizing Creator/creature relationship.

**Luke 18:1-14**; humility; honesty; perseverance in prayer. Note: God's freedom; God cannot be manipulated.

**Luke 10:38-42**; Mary of Bethany, prayer as 'listening'.

**John 2**; Cana, Our Lady's example of petition.

**John 11:17-27**; Martha and Jesus; 32-44; Mary and Jesus The Raising of Lazarus , prayer as relationship.

**2 Corinthians.1:3-7**; Prayer as praise.