It’s week 7 of our journey through the Holy Habit of Prayer.  Is there anything more to say?  You bet!

Oh, and while I still have your attention (there’s a lot in this week’s mail!) don’t miss the shameless plug at the end for our Prayer Evening at Whirlow this Friday.  You know you need to be there!

**How's it going?**

Have you made use of any of last week’s suggestions to help you in praying for your community?  Did any work for you? – please let me know if so!  Whatever, I hope you now feel prompted to have a strong community focus in your praying.  And do remember the point about the Lord’s Prayer being centred around community – so every time you say it, do try to say it for the community that’s on your heart at the time, as well as for yourself.

And one other thing: on Monday as our house group continued our exploration of the Lord’s Prayer, a truly startling thought emerged (again – these House Groups really do work, you know!): **there is no more important prayer to pray for someone, some community, some place or some entity than ‘your Kingdom come’**.  That sums up all the blessing you want to see poured out – salvation, health, wellbeing, security, etc. – because God’s Kingdom is where he reigns, and where he reigns is a place of all goodness.  WOW!

**Let's move on**

**“They devoted themselves … to prayer.”**

**Acts 2:42**

Let’s face it, much of what we’ve covered in this series so far is relatively easy: it just requires a little application to turn these simple acts into lifelong habits!  But we all know that prayer isn’t always like that.  Just like life itself, there are times when we find prayer hard: we’re just too busy; there is something much more enjoyable that we want to do; our prayers aren’t getting answered; it’s dull and boring, and too much like hard work.  And then we read that the early believers “devoted themselves” to prayer – come on!

Is that your experience?  Good, it’s the same for most of us!  But you do want a successful prayer life, right?  Of course you do, you wouldn’t have got to week 7 if you didn’t!

Well, if we really are going to get serious about prayer we need to:

-          Learn to handle difficulties in prayer

-          Apply ourselves to a more disciplined prayer life

Sorry, there was no easy way to tell you that!

Handling difficulties in prayer

We’ve all been there – even Jesus: just think how he struggled and went through agonies as he sought His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane.  But, just as in everything else in life, Jesus has been there before us: he knows what we’re going through and he sends his Spirit to help us (John 14:16).  He’s on your side!

Remember that as you consider your ‘failures’ in prayer:

         I don’t have the faith – yes, you do!  Jesus said you only need faith as small as a mustard seed to move mountains (Matt 17:20).  Start trusting God to move the mountains in your life!

         I don’t have the words – yes, you do!  God is your loving Father, he knows what you need without you telling him (Matt 6:7-8), he just longs to hear you speak from your heart.

         I don’t have the knowledge – well, perhaps not, but God does!  It’s not so much the understanding that matters to God, it’s the caring and the loving, the cry for help on behalf of others that moves Him to action.

         I don’t see answers to my prayers – but have you looked in the right place?  Has not God worked in ways that didn’t expect and haven’t yet recognised?

So, don’t be disillusioned!  Your prayers matter to God – every last one of them.  They rise up as a sweet fragrance before him in Heaven (Rev 5:8).  And, if you really are praying for God to do what’s best (rather than what you want), God gets to work on them as soon as they are uttered, no matter how long it might take for the results to become apparent (Dan 10:12).

Yes, praying can be tough – but never be in any doubt that it’s worth it!

Developing a more disciplined prayer life

This really is getting serious!  Yes, there’s no escaping the fact that we will see greater joys in prayer if we take praying seriously.  But in considering the prayer disciplines let’s not lose sight of the fact that prayer is about relationship with God, and that we are applying ourselves to “know him more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly, day by day”\*.  Being like Jesus was with his Father, in fact – could we want anything better?!

So if we desire that sort of deep prayer life then we should be ready to:

         Be persistent/patient in prayer – trust that God your Father is moved by your heart-felt cries, and is acting upon them with compassion (whether you see it or not) – and so you keep on praying, regardless

         Be specific in prayer – if God has given you someone or something to pray for then set out to pray for them/it on a regular cycle (daily, weekly, etc.) until you sense that your prayers have been answered

         Be believing in prayer – don’t pray because prayer might work, pray because it does!  Remember that there is power in the name of Jesus, so pray in his Name, knowing that Jesus has promised to act when we do (John 14:13-14)

         Be disciplined in prayer – be organised in your praying by using a prayer journal (noting down what comes to you as you pray) and/or a prayer diary (planning ahead what to pray for in the coming week).  And (yes, this is really hard!) try fasting when you have a situation that you feel really desperate about.  The Bible shows that amazing things happened when people fasted in faith – research it and try it!

         Be joined in prayer – as mentioned last week, form a commitment with two or three others to pray together, be it in a together space or cyberspace.  There’s a unique power in two or three praying as one, because agreed prayer results in answered prayer (Matt 18:19)!

So, **here's this week's challenge:** rather than ask you to try a technique, instead **make a commitment to God to give prayer a central place in your life from now on**.  Repeat that commitment each day this week, and let it start to lead you into the determined, faithful prayer life that results in a more wonderful and fruitful relationship with Jesus.

God bless you as you seek Him this week.

**What else can I expect?**

I think we’re all starting to see now that a transformed prayer life results in a transformed life, period.  So let’s explore this further as we arrive at prayer-inspired action!

And, of course, this week we have our **Bents Green Holy Habits** **prayer event at Whirlow Spirituality Centre (Friday 19th, 6.30-9.30pm).**  This will be a time for you to make space for God, to experience Him in quiet contemplation and in new, creative ways of prayer.  I can promise you that it will be different and refreshing, so don’t be surprised if it results in a closer relationship with our Lord!  Joy Adams, Chaplain to [Whirlow Spirituality Centre](https://www.whirlowspiritualitycentre.org/), will lead us in this time of discovery – it will be good!  Drinks will be served on arrival and the session will start at 7pm.  There is ample parking, and lifts will be provided for all those who need them.  Do join us!

\*The prayer of Richard, Bishop of Chichester (1197-1253)

*I really hope that you find these weekly emails are ‘scratching where it itches’; if not, do tell me as I’m always willing to listen and learn!  If all else fails then, of course, just ask me to unsubscribe you.  Please do pray for me and all the Planning Group as we work through the Holy Habits programme, with our sole aim to help the church at Bents Green be better disciples of our Lord Jesus.*

*Produced by Martyn Read on behalf of the Bents Green Holy Habits Planning Group (Debs Barnett, Glenn Evans, Martyn Read, Graham Wassell, Daphne Wilkins, John Wilkins), and based on the* [*Holy Habits*](http://www.holyhabits.co.uk/) *discipleship material supplied by Sheffield Circuit.  You can find more information on the Circuit Holy Habits Programme* [*here*](http://www.sheffieldcircuit.org.uk/newsroom/holy-habits-an-adventure-in-christian-disciple.html) *(be warned: there’s some seriously challenging stuff in there!).*