We’ve arrived at the final weekly mail in the Holy Habits series on Prayer (sighs of relief all round!).  I hope you agree with me that it’s been an exciting journey, because I know I’m in a different place from where I was 9 weeks ago 😲!  In a moment, we will recap and summarise what we’ve learned – but first …

Gladness and Generosity are about to greet us!  (Go on, admit it, you know you’ve been looking forward to this one!).  To kick off this next phase of our Holy Habits experience **we have a Church Prayer Meeting this Saturday (3 Nov), 10-11am.**  You’ll be well equipped for this now 😇, so let’s come together to ask God to bless this next stage just as He has done for us in Prayer.

**So, what have we learned about Prayer?**

Where do we start?!  Well, let’s briefly restate the main learning from each week:

         Week 1 – we began with a prayer of commitment to a new discipleship in Christ through exploring the Holy Habits together.  Why not return to that prayer now to underline to yourself the determination to keep seeking God and not let go until he blesses you (Gen 32:26)!

         Week 2 – making time to listen to God.  Developing a real relationship with him, growing through active two-way communication, learning what he wants for your life.

         Week 3 – bringing prayer into our everyday routine.  Learning to pray ‘in the moment’ wherever we are, and in turn becoming more receptive and responsive to God’s promptings – which makes us more likely to know and do his will!

         Week 4 – making God, rather than ourselves, the focus of our prayers.  Seeing afresh the importance of the Lord’s Prayer as the model for how we should pray, as reforming our desires (and thus our prayers) to see his kingdom come and will done above all things.

         Week 5 – discovering some new techniques in prayer, helpful tools to focus and sustain your prayer life.  Why not determine now to take at least one of these and make it a regular feature of your praying!

         Week 6 – recognising the communities of which we are a part, and the importance of ongoing prayer for them.  Praying ‘your kingdom come’ in them, to see the fullness of God’s blessing poured out on them.  (There were more techniques for this, too!).

         Week 7 – accepting that prayer isn’t always easy, and that it does inevitably involve real commitment!  Learning how to handle difficulties in prayer, and also apply ourselves to a more disciplined prayer life.

         Week 8 – understanding that prayer requires a response from ourselves, as well as God!  It’s his plan that we achieve things in partnership with him, and are fulfilled in doing so.

Wow, we’ve come a long way, haven’t we!  I will be honest with you: although the Holy Habits booklets give pointers to the things that might be covered in each phase of the programme, God through his Spirit has most definitely shaped the learning that we have been receiving at bents Green through these weekly messages.

And I say ‘we’ because I have been learning along with you!  This has been an invigorating experience for me too as we have journeyed through prayer together.  I have been greatly sustained by encouraging comments and prayerful support from so many of you, and the effect that these mails have had amongst us has left me in no doubt whatsoever that the wisdom and inspiration that we have received can only have come from our Lord.  These are exciting days - all praise to Him alone!

Right, **here's this week's challenge** (come on, you didn’t think you’d get away without one this week, did you?!): make a copy of the 8 week learning summary above and put it somewhere where you’re going to see it often to remind and encourage you in prayer.  Also make an ongoing monthly diary note to review how your prayer life is going and make whatever adjustments you need to keep your relationship with God fresh. And share it with someone to spur each other on!

**Change is happening!**

Before we leave prayer, let me share with you a testimony from Ruth about how Holy Habits has made a real difference in introducing prayer to her Sparklers group (children aged 2½ to 5) on a Sunday morning:

“I was at first concerned at how to present prayer in a meaningful way to such young children – so I began by praying about it!  I then looked at the material from the Holy Habits team, and also ‘Googled’ prayer crafts for children.

“Over the five Sundays in September we have looked at prayer, using different activities.  We’ve played the Prayer Bear board game (which encourages good prayer habits); made a prayer wristband (different coloured beads signifying different things/people to pray for); made a prayer cube (the faces having different prayer types – sorry, thank you, please, etc.); using fingers to prompt different prayers (the prayer hand); hung thank you prayers on a ‘washing line’; made a prayer card based on the Lord’s Prayer.

“Each week with the children I have discussed what the Bible says about prayer.  I have tried to make the sessions fun and practical to help them learn more readily.  The weekly preparation for the sessions has helped my own prayer life and given me different ways to pray.  God has shown me how to expand and revitalise my own prayer life!”

Isn’t that thrilling?  And that’s just one example of what God is doing amongst us.  We sure have reasons to be cheerful right now!

**And finally …**

I had to end with this inspiring quote on prayer from Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, which in a few words says so much of what I’ve been trying to say these past 9 weeks:

“Prayer causes huge collateral damage to all our vanity and our ambition, and our hopes of self-advancement and self-centredness. Being in partnership with God reveals to us our true identity. Not the bad things that many of us feel about ourselves, but the sheer beauty that is what God feels about us, because of what he did on the Cross. And it reveals God to us in his true identity – and we can never be the same again afterwards.”

God bless you as you seek Him this week and into the future in partnership with him.

*Please do pray for the Holy Habits 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. And do give John and Daphne the same support and encouragement that you have given me as they lead us through Gladness & Generosity together.*

*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!).*