

## Living it out (Application):

**Last week's question:** How did you face troubles or struggles by worshipping God?

Are you committed to praying for the Kingdom with other people? Why/Why not?

## Coming Up at St Mark's

**Our website has had a makeover.** Go to [www.smch.org.uk](http://www.smch.org.uk) and tell your friends about it. If there is anything you want on the website, let Guy know.

**New communion ministrants' training:** 4pm, 19<sup>th</sup> May, either at church or in-depth diocesan training at the same time.

**Andy's ordination.** Just to flag up, Andy P will be ordained a priest at 9.15 service on 30<sup>th</sup> June and celebrate communion at 11.15 that day..

Date for your diary. **Church hog roast and summer celebration**, for all the family...keep lunchtime on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July.



### *Please pray for...*

Pray for **growth in our life as a praying people.**

Give thanks for a **great men's weekend.**

Pray for someone you know who works in a **business environment**, for the wisdom and integrity to bring the values of God's Kingdom into their work.

Pray for our teaching over the next two weeks on **work issues** – that it would equip us to follow Jesus “everywhere, in everything.”

Pray for Christians undergoing persecution in **Syria and Iraq.**

Pray for **Andrea O'Neill** and **Philip Hawley** recovering at home.

Pray for the **communication of our plans** for action over the next couple of months – for clarity and shared vision.

#### **Mission Partner Prayer Focus:**

Pray for **Paul Turner**, running the Lima marathon for Arco Iris children's home in Peru on May 19<sup>th</sup>.

Please do take the opportunity for more prayer requests/feedback - it's a wonderful way of sharing.

**Thank you for your prayers for this church community!**

On Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June we will be giving people the opportunity to write down anonymously any questions/comments related to our future plans. I will collate them and do a video response...

# INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 19<sup>th</sup> May 2013

## Worship/reflection:

The Way of Jesus: Two: Love God, love others...How have you received love this week? Thank God for all the ways He has shown you His love in the last week.

### Without action vision is a daydream: Prayer

**Briefly reflect on the main way God spoke to you through this Sunday's teaching:** Acts 4: 23-31; Matt 7: 7-11. As we continue to examine the actions that we are going to be taking as we move forward, I would love to be able to **motivate everyone in this church community to be passionate about prayer**, learning how to pray on your own, enthusiastic about praying with others. But I believe there are some real questions which get in the way of us investing our lives in prayer.

In the book “Letters from a Sceptic” (Which by the way if you haven't read I would thoroughly recommend) an atheist father writes to his Christian son posing every single difficult question you can think of. About prayer he says this: "I don't see how prayer could ever work. If God is all good and all-powerful and concerned about us, doesn't he already want the best for us? So what are you asking for in prayer? For Him to care more? He supposedly already cares as much as he could. Are you asking Him to do more? He's supposedly already doing everything he can. Are you informing Him of some problem so he'll do something about it? He supposedly already knows everything. **So you can't inform Him about anything, you can't coax Him to do anything, and you can't empower Him to do anything. So what are you doing when you pray?**" We get confused too as to how we fit into the grand scheme of things - we are so small, God is so big - **why would He care about what we think?** Or we don't know how prayer "works" -and I mean intercessory prayer. Does it really make a difference if I pray with others or not? Is God really interested? What do I do when I'm not that good at praying with others?

We urgently need to address some of these questions - because I believe that if we are going to grow as Christians, as a church community, and most importantly if we are going to see God's kingdom grow - then we have to be people of prayer. But we need to start with the bottom line - and that is that from the Bible we can clearly tell that **the early Christians believed that when they prayed together God would act.** For example, in Jerusalem the authorities have told Peter and John to stop preaching. What is their response? To get together with their brothers and sisters – to proclaim who God is - and to pray for further boldness. They simply called on His name and “after they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken - they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” And they continued to meet together daily.

I was listening to Justin Welby speaking on the Internet at a leadership conference this week. **He said the one thing that will make the difference in the renewal of this land is when Christians get together to pray.** So how do we address, or begin to address, the questions at the beginning? Why on earth does God need us to pray - how can it make any difference? In brief, **it is because of the kind of relationship He wants to have with us.** On one level, God doesn't need our prayers. But on another, **He's made things work in such a way that we can have a genuine loving relationship with Him.** And because He wants a genuine loving relationship, **He has to give us genuine, real ability to partner with Him.** A true relationship has give and take between both parties - this is as true in our relationship with God as it is in our relationships with other people. So God has ordered things so that in His loving, gracious relationship with you He is not the one making all the moves. Why does our prayer matter? **Simply, because God loves us enough to dignify us with genuine partnership with Him.** God has designed the universe in such a way that your prayers can have a real, tangible effect on things. Because He wants a love-relationship. In a real way the presence of the kingdom in Harrogate, the growth of this church, the effectiveness of your leaders, all hangs on your prayers.

"Really?" You might say. "Tiny, little humans? God is really interested in wanting to give us a say so in the universe? We are so insignificant!" That is true on one level. But why should **we assume that being small also means being unimportant?** (I personally feel passionate about this!!) Just because we're small in the physical order of things, it doesn't mean we can't be important in the spiritual scheme of things. Is Jupiter more important than Earth because it's 100 times larger? Think of how Jesus expresses God's love for His "small creatures": Which of you fathers, though you are evil, would give your son a snake when he asks for a fish? How much more will your Heavenly Father give His spirit to those who ask Him? If a multimillionaire were to rescue a poor, insignificant beggar, wouldn't that just emphasise the greatness of His love? **Doesn't the contrast between the two reveal how deep the love truly is?** And in the same way, God's care of small humans - His dignifying of us - only reveals how truly amazing His love is.

We struggle to believe that God is really interested in our prayer. But at the end of the day this is secretly because we have a picture of God which is 1,000,000 miles from that revealed by Jesus. **Jesus shows again and again that God is the God who will do anything to get close to us.** Is there anything more that Jesus could have done - apart from becoming human, apart from dying for us - that would convince you that God is interested in you? Perhaps we would be more encouraged to pray if we could see how clearly it "worked". If prayer was more like a vending machine - you put in your prayer and out comes the answer - then perhaps we'd be doing it all the time. But one of the issues we face - because of the infinite complexity of the universe and the profound depth of the mind of God - **is that there are simply no formulas.** People who give you an ABC of prayer and tell you that it will guarantee an outcome will make you depressed.

Yet while there is no ABC, there are however simple principles about praying together which relate to the numbers of people praying and the intensity with which they pray. There is a story in which the disciples, despite having previously had success, cannot cure a boy with an evil spirit. They take him to Jesus who heals him. But when the disciples ask why they were unable to do it Jesus says, "This kind can only be driven out by prayer," by which he means **consistent, purposeful prayer.** He is telling them that sometimes **the manner, the effort, and the amount of prayer matters.** Another time Jesus is praying for a blind man, and he asks him if he can see and the blind man says, "Well, kind of. I can see people but they look like trees." So Jesus says, "OK," and prays some more. **Even Jesus had to keep on praying.**

The amount matters - but also I believe, the numbers are significant. Think of prayer meetings as army gatherings. I heard of a man who took his son down to the docks. A huge iron boat was

moored against the quay. The man lent his arms against the boat and started to push. After 30 minutes' pushing, the boat suddenly started to move away from the dock. It's a true story! The man turned to his young son and he said, "I want you to learn two things. If I had given up five seconds before, the boat wouldn't have moved. **There is a tipping point at which the effort I have invested becomes effective. But also want you to know something else: it would have happened sooner if you had been helping me.**" Praying together is mysterious in many ways - but persistent, consistent, unified prayer and fasting ushers in the Kingdom.

As a church we have a vision: **Everyone is passionate about prayer....** We are **resourced** to develop our personal prayer ..We humbly expect, pray for and long to see people becoming Christians...We know praying is as vital as breathing, and so we take **whatever opportunities we can to pray together** and use whatever **networks and media** we can to communicate prayer needs. And, because vision without action is a daydream, we have a plan: Appoint a **Prayer Co-ordinator** who will lead individual and community prayer and resource the church. Build **intercessory teams.** Have **prayer ministry teams** at each service. **Provide training** for both. Re-establish a web based **prayer diary.** Encourage prayer through **whole church prayer gatherings,** workshop days, prayer room, 24/7 prayer. Collect and encourage **feedback from answered prayer.**

But when it comes to prayer meetings, or prayer gatherings, some of us stay away because we feel we are not good at prayer - we're threatened by praying with others out loud. And you are right-it is scary. **Because when you pray you open your heart.** But I always want to encourage people to **practise** - to take steps towards being able to pray with others. There are many reasons why this is a good idea, but here are a couple that are important to me. The first is that **there is no greater blessing than having someone who will come alongside you and pray words over you.** It's encouraging, it's affirming. The second reason is that I believe the best thing for all of us is to get to a place where we can pray like children before God - unselfconsciously - **a place where we are not thinking about what others think about us, or even about what we think of ourselves, but only what God our loving Father thinks of us.** Where praying "right" or "wrong" is irrelevant. That's why I encourage you to push yourself and to keep stepping forward in prayer because it will develop your own relationship of openness with others and with God. And we need to be growing as a praying community.

It may sound difficult to give yourself to prayer - but think about it. What does it say **not** to pray about things? We have the power of the universe creating God at our disposal, but we are too busy? First we will sort out our life, our family, our church, our job, and **then** we will come to God???? It may sound difficult, but deep in my heart I'm tired of the times I try and live this life, do this ministry, see the kingdom come, in my own strength. It's exhausting on our own. So maybe God says to us, "Submit, wash, come near, give yourself to prayer," because He knows that it's what will make all the difference. Right now the Bible tells us, Jesus is spending His time doing that - interceding for us at the right hand of God. Let's move forward in our vision of giving ourselves to prayer and may each of us grow closer to our Loving Father who is intimately interested in every prayer of our hearts.

## Study

Watch the video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOYe-FGr37w&feature=share&list=UUztQw1VGobuM13hwinNRwmg> Any responses?

What's your response to the actions being proposed in the pamphlet/video (with a particular focus on "Prayer"?)

Everything Jesus said directly about prayer: Matthew 6:6-8. Matthew 18:19, 20. Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:24; Mark 16:17, 18. Luke 11:5-10. Luke 18:2-8. John 15:16, 7. John 16:24. What is He saying to you about it today through these passages?