

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups July 12th 2009
More love...More Power! Empowering Prayer Ephesians 6:10-24



Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

Today we come to the final passage in Ephesians and the penultimate week of our series 'More Love More Power' and it is fitting that we should be focussing on prayer which is at the centre of our life together. The renewal of our vision here at St Paul's calls for an empowering of our prayer life – prayer that is amongst other things 'more real, more regular, more creative more powerful and more normal!' Prayer that is essentially Spirit filled. In our passage today Paul answers for us three key questions about prayer: Why should we pray, How should we pray and When should we pray.

Why should we Pray? Last week we focussed on Paul's teaching at the beginning of chapter 6 on empowering our children and young people, Paul goes on to speak about slaves and masters v 5 -9, so it is a bit of a shock when in v 10 he begins to unleash some important teaching on Spiritual warfare! One moment he is talking about down to earth practical relationships then suddenly we are plunged into the armour of God! Read v 10 -11. What Paul is essentially saying is that the life of faith is a battle! If this battle is not 'fought out' in the events of everyday life such as jobs, families, relationships where is it fought? In our secular society the battle for hearts and minds is very real. Not long ago the press reported that Anand Rao, a Christian nurse who worked for the Leicester NHS Trust, was sacked after a role-play exercise in which he suggested that patients go to church and pray and Caroline Petrie a nurse from Weston-super-Mare, in Somerset was reinstated after North Somerset NHS Trust overturned her suspension for offering to pray for a patient. There are not many of us who would argue with Paul's description of this world as a 'dark world' v12 or as the RSV puts it 'this present darkness,' for the battle we are in is against what Paul describes as 'spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' v12. The Biblical picture is of a world in which there is no division between the physical, material, scientific and the supernatural. In this context the belt of truth, the breast plate of righteousness, gospel boots, a faith shield, salvation helmet and spirit sword are key to living out the Christian life, but pervading all our spiritual life and all spiritual warfare is prayer – read 18 -20. Why pray? Well simply put without prayer the battle is already lost! We cannot even begin to equip ourselves for the struggle without talking to God, without asking him to strengthen our faith, to help us stand firm, to give us that peace that the world cannot give. It is only with prayer, as we cooperate with the Spirit of God that battles are won.

How should we pray? Paul gives us two pointers in v18 – to pray in the Spirit and to pray all kinds of prayer and requests. Pray in the Spirit involves being open to the Holy Spirit's prompting and guiding, leading and direction, listening out for the words to pray that the Spirit gives us. On occasion this may be praying using the gift of tongues. Prayer remains mysterious at one level but on another it is deeply practical. William Temple declared that whatever else one might say about whether prayer worked he had noticed that when he prayed 'coincidences' happened and when he stopped praying the coincidences stopped happening! Tom Wright comments that it is a bit like the great golfer who when someone accused him of being lucky agreed, but commented that he's noticed that the more he practices the luckier he got! How should we pray? We should pray led and empowered by the Spirit for all things – the ordinary and extraordinary – for governments and world issues – for peace and justice - for personal need - for healing and wholeness - for daily life - for God's kingdom to come. "Pray the largest prayers. You cannot think a prayer so large that God in answering it will not wish you had made it larger. Pray not for crutches but for wings!" Philip Brooks. So finally....

When should we pray? In a nutshell always! In verse 18 Paul urges us to pray in the Spirit "on all occasions"....always keep on praying." Henri Nowen writes "As we are involved in unceasing thinking so we are called to unceasing prayer." It is instant Access 24/7 every day every year for eternity!

Over the coming year there will be several new prayer initiatives at St Paul's that will help us to pray both as individuals, in triplets and together. So look out for – PRAYPALS, Time Together and the TIME OUT principle

May prayer that is more real, more natural, and more powerful be the life blood of our church..may the Holy Spirit empower us and may Spirit filled prayer be the foundation for all that God will do in us and through us.

Witness: choose from these questions to discuss

1. Do a quick health check on your prayer life – how do the following match up with your prayer life."More real , more natural, more creative, more powerful."
2. Would you agree with Paul's description of the world as being a 'dark world'?
3. What evidence can you see for Paul's observation that we are involved in a battle with spiritual forces of evil?
4. What do you think it means to 'pray in the Spirit'? Give some examples from your own experiences.
5. Have you ever prayed in tongues? Share with one another your experience.
6. Discuss William Temple's statement about prayer and coincidence from your own personal perspective.
7. When do you pray? Only at set times? How could Paul's instruction to 'pray on all occasions' work out for you?