



Pray for the Nation ~ INOI MO TE MOTU

Intercessors for New Zealand

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Jesus said, "... I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against [or over-power] it."
Matthew 16:18

Praying for the Church

Part 1

The Church of Jesus Christ comprises everyone who has been born again by God's Holy Spirit and is following Jesus, their Lord and Saviour. God is always seeking to draw unsaved people to Himself, and it is primarily through the Church that people hear the Gospel and are drawn into God's Kingdom, nurtured in the Faith, and grow to be mature sons and daughters of the living God. Therefore, the success or otherwise of what happens, is very largely due to how Christians live, both individually and corporately in their church fellowships. Over the next few weeks we will especially ask for prayer for different aspects of the Church.

The Church – its love for the Lord, worship of the Lord, and service for the Lord

Jesus said that the first and greatest commandment is that people should "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength" (body, soul and spirit – every part of our being, and every aspect of our lives).

- Please pray that the Church – you and me and all other Christians – will place the Lord God first in everything to do with our lives; that we will love Him, worship Him in Spirit and in Truth, and serve Him to the glory of His name.
- Pray that we will not be half-hearted, discouraged, or distracted; that we will not give up in our love and devotion for the Lord; that we will not become so preoccupied with the world that we have little or no time left for the things of God; but that we will love, worship and serve Him wholeheartedly.

Part 2

There is very little mention of what Jesus prayed, in the Bible, and by far the longest prayer in the Gospels is in John 17 where Jesus prays for His followers, the Church and for unity between His followers. Unity between true believers will only come about when we determine that we will not let the world, the flesh, or the devil divide us! Unity will only come when we love and care for one another as Jesus loves and cares for us. If Jesus treated us as we sometimes treat other believers, we would be in a very bad way!

- Please pray that we will truly love one another – *in word and in deed* – as God loves us.

- Pray that the world, the flesh and the devil will not gain victories in our lives, but that we will overcome by the power of God's Holy Spirit, and be the people God calls us to be.
- Pray that we will treat others as we would like them to treat us; that we will love one another as we love ourselves.
- Pray that God will forgive us, cleanse us and deliver us from all wrong attitudes and actions towards one another.

Part 3

Fellowship, encouragement and mutual support are three major areas of the Church. As well as worship and service to God, these are three other very important aspects of what the Church does. The main place where Christians can get true spiritual fellowship through praying together, sharing together, and the support we all need in difficult or adverse times, is through the group of Christians we regularly meet with. Our spiritual growth, understanding of God's Word and His ways, coming to a deeper relationship with the Lord, encouragement in our witness, and help in other practical ways, can be hugely assisted by our Christian friends. It is difficult to live as a "lone" Christian, without the support of others.

Please pray that:

- Every church will see the importance of serving, helping, encouraging and building one another up in their faith, and in other practical ways too.
- Christians will not be so preoccupied with themselves and their own needs, that they do not see and assist other Christians with their needs too.
- Christians who have become hurt or disillusioned by people in the church, and have stopped having regular Christian fellowship, will see that this is not helpful to their own spiritual growth or that of others that they should be helping. Pray that they will return to fellowship regularly with God's people. Pray for reconciliation between isolated Christians and those by whom they may have been hurt or misunderstood.
- Christians and churches will do what they can to minister fellowship, love and support to people who, because of age or health or for other reasons, are not able to meet regularly with fellow-believers. May those who enjoy the fellowship of other Christians regularly, not forget those who are unable to do so!

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His name is *J e s u s*

4. *Jesus studied the Scriptures and prayed*

Undoubtedly, one of the most important things that Jesus did, during His life here on earth, was to walk closely with His Father.

Jesus prayed and talked with His Father. Jesus listened to His Father. He was guided, led and empowered by the Spirit of God. He learned the Old Testament Scriptures which the Holy Spirit had inspired. And He taught His disciples to do likewise!

In John's Gospel we read of Jesus saying, "The Son can do nothing on His own, but only what He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows Him all that He Himself is doing; and He will show Him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. ... I can do nothing on My own. As I hear, I judge. My judgement is just because I do not seek to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." (John 5:19-20, 30).

"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realise that I AM, and that I do nothing on My own, but I speak these things as the Father has instructed Me. The One who sent Me is with Me; He has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to Him." (John 8:28-29).

So, what else do the Gospels show us that Jesus did and taught with respect to the Scriptures and prayer?

The Scriptures

Jesus obviously had an excellent knowledge and understanding of the (Old Testament) Scriptures. Luke 2:41-52 tells us that Jesus' parents used to take Him to the Temple in Jerusalem every year at the time of Passover. Even at the age of 12, He was found "in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and they were amazed at His understanding and His answers!" "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and with people."

Later, after being baptised in water and the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21-22), "Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit ... began to teach in the synagogues [in Galilee] and was praised by everyone. ... He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was His custom." There He was given the scroll of Isaiah and He turned to Isaiah 61:1-2 and, after reading it, He said "Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus then spoke about Himself and His ministry as a prophet and healer, which angered the people, even though they had spoken well of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that He spoke! (Luke 4:14-30).

Jesus obviously knew the Scriptures well; He not only often quoted them, and taught them, but also interpreted

them on a number of occasions, and applied them to Himself as "the Messiah who was to come."

Jesus prayed

Prayer, and relationship with His Father, were crucial to the life and ministry of Jesus. Fasting was also part of this; for example, immediately after His baptism with the Spirit, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where He prayed and fasted for forty days, and was tempted by the devil. He overcame each of the devil's temptations by quoting the Scripture to the devil!

Jesus went up a mountain to pray alone (Mark 6:46); He prayed at His baptism (Luke 3:21-22); in deserted places (Luke 5:16); before choosing His disciples (Luke 6:12-13); He prayed with His disciples nearby (Luke 9:18); He was praying when He was transfigured on a mountain top (Luke 9:28-29).

It is interesting, however, to note that we have very little of *what* He prayed – simply, that He did pray.

Twelve times it is recorded that Jesus gave thanks. In fact, before He fed the 5000 and the 4000 people, every reference in the Gospels (6 times) it says He gave thanks for the loaves and the fish. He gave thanks for the Passover bread and the cup.

Also it is interesting to notice that, with the single exception of the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:41-42) there is *never* any mention of Jesus praying before He healed the sick, raised the dead, delivered the demon-possessed, or performed a miracle! He did, of course, touch people or lay hands on them, and prayer may have been implied by this, but it is not specifically mentioned. However, Jesus lived a life of prayer and fellowship with His Father!

The Lord's prayer is given in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4.

By far the longest prayer we have, that Jesus prayed, is found in John chapter 17, where Jesus prays for His followers and the Church – especially for unity between them! How critically important it must be, if the longest recorded prayer of Jesus (26 verses) is for unity between believers!

The first three Gospels all mention Jesus' prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane just before His arrest, but while He must have prayed for quite some time, the disciples fell asleep and very little is recorded (two sentences) of what He prayed (Matt. 26:36-46).

We also have Jesus' three prayers from the cross: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46).

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

“Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit” (Luke 23:46).

Finally, we have Jesus’ blessing of the eleven disciples before He ascended back into Heaven (Luke 24:50-51).

Jesus’ teaching on prayer

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught about prayer and fasting (Matt. 6:5-18) and He said, “*When* you pray ...” so prayer was assumed of every believer! He also told us to “Ask (and keep on asking), ... seek (and keep on seeking), knock (and keep on knocking), ...” (Matt. 7:7-11).

Jesus referred to some things only happening in answer to prayer with fasting (Mark 9:29).

He mentioned the need to agree in prayer, when we pray with one another (Matt. 18:19-20).

He said we need to pray with faith, and to forgive one another (Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:20-26). In fact, on a number of occasions when sick people came to Jesus, He saw their faith and responded to it.

Jesus called the Temple, God’s “House of Prayer”, so prayer is a primary purpose of God’s people meeting together! (Luke 19:45-46).

QUESTIONS

1. How closely do you think Christians can follow Jesus’ example of “seeing what the Father is doing” and seek to do likewise? (John 5:19-20).
2. How did Jesus learn the Old Testament Scriptures? (He probably didn’t have a written copy of them).
3. In Luke chapter 4, why was the people’s response so different in verses 28-29, compared with verse 22?
4. What are the main areas of Jesus’ prayer in John chapter 17 (that is, the main things Jesus prayed, in this chapter)?
5. What are the main areas Jesus covers in the Lord’s Prayer?
6. When should Christians fast as well as pray? What is the purpose of fasting as well as praying?
7. How much prayer is carried out in the Church, when Christians meet together? Are our meetings really times of prayer, or are they almost entirely other things?

Prayer Suggestions

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Part 4

Part of the reason why Christians meet together is to help enable its members’ welfare. As Christians, we are called to love one another, support one another, and to so care for each other that where there are needs, we, as a church or Christian fellowship of believers, seek to minister to one another in every way. This includes seeking to meet one another’s physical, financial, social and spiritual needs, wherever possible – and, at the very least, pray for one another.

Please pray:

- That Christians will not be so self-focused that we are not aware of, or concerned about, the needs of fellow-Christians in our churches.
- That where there are needs within the church, no matter what those needs may be, we will pray for those in need and seek, as a Christian fellowship, to minister to one another and support one another in every possible way.
- Please pray for people in your church who may have health needs, family issues, financial or physical needs; for those who are struggling spiritually, or mentally; for those who are lonely, feel rejected or need social support, etc.

(To be continued next month)

PRAYER FOR THE MUSLIM WORLD

Each year we join with other Christians around the world in 30 days of prayer for those in the Muslim world. This

year, this will take place from **Saturday 27 May until Sunday 25 June**; praying with faith, hope and love for those who are Muslims. It is estimated that last year about one million Christians used the *30 Days of Prayer* guide to pray for Muslims during their month of Ramadan. If you haven’t already got your *30 Days of Prayer* booklet, please email info@marn.org.nz urgently to order your copy/copies (\$8 per copy, posted within NZ) or see www.marn.org.nz

- Please remember to pray for the Muslim world during this month, and for Muslims in New Zealand, the United States, the rest of the Western world, the Middle East (including Israel), other Muslim-majority countries, and countries where Islam is in a minority.
- Pray that the Lord God will reveal Himself and His Son – the Way, the Truth and the Life – bringing both revelation and eternal life to those who do not yet know Him as Lord and Saviour.

OUR NZ GOVERNMENT

Some of our MPs are retiring before the next General Election on Saturday 23 September, and there has just been a reshuffle of Cabinet and Ministerial positions in Government. The main changes are that **Nikki Kaye** has become Minister of Education; **Gerry Brownlee** has been made Foreign Affairs Minister; and **Mark Mitchell** is the new Minister of Defence. Please pray for wisdom for all Ministers and their Ministries in Government; and for all our MPs, that they will lead our country well, in ways that are pleasing to the Lord, and for the benefit of our people.

Some areas of major concern, which require much prayer, are listed below. Please pray concerning these areas, for Godly wisdom for our leaders to know how these situations are best handled, and for our society as a whole to do all it can to make improvements in these areas.

1. **One-parent homes**, where the parent is struggling to raise a family; for children in these homes; for children who do not really know their parents – or even know who they are, in some cases.
2. **Bad role models** in homes where children are living, by those looking after the children, including bad examples by older brothers or sisters.
3. **Violence in society**, and on television, the internet, in films and other sources which are bad influences of people's thinking and actions.
4. **Gangs which are unhealthy** in different ways – morally, violent, drugs, alcohol, crime, etc.
5. **Alcohol and drug abuse**
6. **Sexual abuse, immorality and depravity**
7. **Mental and emotional abuse**, including bullying

Ultimately, the answer to all these situations is divine intervention and people coming to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, and becoming followers (true disciples) of Him.

- Please pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon our land once again, that transforms our people and hence our nation.
- Pray that people will hunger and thirst for something and Someone better, and seek Him until they find Him.

CHILDREN IN NEED

Many of our children – here in New Zealand – are in real need. While we have so much to praise and thank God for in our land, there are still many needs. Two that have been mentioned in the media recently are:

Children going hungry during the school holidays (*DomPost*, 2 May 2017)

Agencies that tackle child poverty have said that the school holidays pose a number of problems for those children who would normally receive support through their schools – sometimes the food children got at school would be all that they eat that day! KidsCan has a Food for Kids program that provides meals every school day for more than 23,000 hungry children a week, with bread, spreads, hot food, fruit, baked beans and scroggin. They also provide raincoats, footwear, socks, plasters and sanitary products. The head of the Salvation Army's social services is quoted as saying that the demand for its food parcels was about 20% higher during the school holidays. And this is New Zealand we are talking about!

Please pray for those families in need. Pray for organisations like KidsCan and the Salvation Army, and others who seek to help children who are hungry or

lacking in basic needs. Pray that parents will spend their money wisely. Pray for real solutions to real problems that many families in our society are facing.

One in seven New Zealand children has asthma (*DomPost*, 3 May 2017)

Nationally, 1 in 7 children in New Zealand has asthma. The rate is even higher in some places – almost 1 in 4 children in Whanganui is medicated for asthma; 1 in 5 in Gisborne, Taranaki and Wairarapa; 1 in 6 in Hutt Valley. Last year 70 people died from asthma, and the estimated cost of childhood asthma in 2013 (four years ago) was over \$58 million.

Please pray concerning the causes of asthma, and the high incident rates. Pray for good and better treatment processes. Pray for all those people researching into better ways of minimising and treating this condition. Pray for all those suffering from asthma.

PRAYING & SHARING THE GOSPEL

More and more, New Zealand is becoming a nation with a large number of its people having come from many different countries, nationalities, customs and religious beliefs. This can be seen as a challenge to our own racial group, customs, and Faith, or it can be seen as an opportunity to share the love of God and the Lord Jesus Christ with people living in our own communities. Besides these differences, we already have, in our country, a vast majority of people who really have no real faith or relationship with the one true God; who often live mostly for themselves, their own pleasures and desires, and “get on reasonably well without God”. On the one hand, Jesus said to His disciples to “Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every person ...” and on the other hand, He is bringing many of these people to us – to share the true love of God and His Son, in the power of His Spirit, with those He leads us to.

Please pray that:

- We will see ways of sharing our faith with people of other backgrounds.
- We won't be afraid to share what we have experienced of the love and salvation of the Lord.
- God will lead us to the right people, and give us the wisdom and grace to share with them.
- We will find people whose hearts are open to hear and receive what the Lord is offering to them.
- The love and power of God will touch many hearts of both total unbelievers (people of no faith), and those of other faiths, and that God will reveal Himself to them.
- Many thousands of Christians will take up the challenge of Global Outreach Day (Saturday 27 May) to pray for someone's salvation and seek to actively share their faith with them on (or around) that day. See www.globaloutreachday.com for further details.

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Weekly *Prayer Updates* can be found on our website: www.pray-for-the-nation.org/prayer-updates.php

This monthly *Prayer Letter* is also on our website: www.pray-for-the-nation.org/monthly-magazines.php