

Prayer Sunday March 2018

Why a Prayer Sunday?

We take communion on a regular basis to remind us of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for our sins and his resurrection to eternal life to intercede for us and to restore our relationship with God through prayer.

It is good, therefore, to remind ourselves from time to time of the vital part that prayer plays in our relationship with god. It is our communication channel both with and from God.

We are reminded several times in the Bible about prayer from the Old Testament right through the New so it is good that we should remind ourselves from time to time and what better time than when Spring is bursting out in the hedgerows and in our gardens. I don't know about you but our garden has lots of spring flowers starting to show through, crocuses, grape hyacinths and tete a tete daffodils bringing colour and life to what was dull brown earth. Perhaps some of us have been a bit sad and depressed by winter with the short days and long nights, rain and snow? Perhaps we need Spring to come into our lives with a fresh outpouring of God's Spirit? Today i a day when we can do that as we kick start our prayer life again. If you don't need the kick start that's great then you can help enthuse those of us who need it.

Perhaps one of the best known reminders about how prayer moves God's heart is found in 2 Chron 7:14 where we are told,

"If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

Do we want our sins forgiven, do we want our land healed/ Are we prepared to humble ourselves before God SEEK His face and turn from our wicked ways? And on top of all that pray?

If we can do that with sincerity of heart then god will keep His promises and will bless our land and our church.

Let's repeat that verse a few times so we remember it.....

Why should we pray some people ask God knows everything already. Here are six great reasons why:

1. We pray because we are God's children and He loves to hear from us! Zephaniah 3:17
2. We pray because it deepens our trust in God. Philippians 4:6-7
3. We pray because it causes us to depend on God. Isaiah 40:26
4. We pray because it gives us the chance to express ourselves completely to God. Psalm 62:8
5. We pray because our prayers move the heart of God

James 4:26. We pray because it's an amazing way that we get to be involved with what God is already doing in our world.

1 Thessalonians 5:25

And of course, we pray because Jesus told us to.

Mother Theresa said:

"God shapes the world by prayer. The more praying there is in the world the better the world will be, the mightier the forces against evil.

Today is a day when we are going to look at something which should be part of our everyday experience as Christians. It should be as natural to us as breathing and yet, and I include myself in this, for many of us we struggle to find the time or the inclination to pray as we ought. There are those who have a great passion for prayer and are great prayer warriors for individuals, for the church and in their own lives and I salute you.

We are told many times in the Bible about how prayer is important in our relationship with God. In fact without prayer we do not really have any deep relationship with Him. That well known verse in Philippians tells us:

" Do not be anxious or worried about anything, but in everything (every circumstance and situation) by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, continue to make your (specific) requests known to God."

Philippians 4:6 (AMP)

A pastor, far cleverer than I once said, Prayer is not the least we can do (I am often told off by Lynne for saying "Let's JUST pray"), but the most we can do. Prayer tears down our self reliance and increases our reliance and confidence in God.

Martin Luther is quoted as saying:

"I know whenever I have prayed earnestly that I have been amply heard and have obtained more than I prayed for. God indeed sometimes delays but at last He came."

I know testimony Sunday is next week, but I want, with your indulgence, to share a little of how God has worked in my life through prayer and brought me to where I am now and also how He has brought NCF to where we are. Some of it you may have heard before but many of you have arrived since we came into this building so hopefully you will be amazed, as we were as we saw it happening, at how good and faithful God is when we pray. Also as John and I work together and with God to smoothly change our roles and look forward to what God has to bring through John's ministry into the church, to share a few thoughts on that future.

Lynne and I came to NCF, we believe, because of answered prayer.

It was back in the late 1980's and we were going through a particularly difficult time in our lives. Lynne had become a Christian in 1984 during an evangelical campaign by Ian Knox at Manor Court Baptist church. At the same time I rededicated my life to God having been in a wilderness for some

20 years following my initial acceptance of Christ in my late teens. Lynne went through a traumatic few years following her acceptance of Christ as Saviour and we both were fairly traumatised and battered as we lost both of our mums within six weeks of each other, one was expected as she had terminal cancer but the other was completely unexpected. There were many answered prayers during this time and some amazing touches from God as He didn't remove the difficulties we encountered but walked with us through them and we knew He was with us despite everything that was going on around us. However, because of a number of different circumstances we had stopped attending church, and to cut a long story short, God brought a young man called Chris McDermott into our lives and he knew some of our story and felt that we ought to try a newly planted church called Nuneaton Christian Fellowship that he was attending. We went along and were warmly welcomed and we had, very graciously!, three questions that we really needed answers to from God, following our traumatic times.

God was, not unsurprisingly, gracious to us and the first three sermons that we heard in NCF addressed each of those questions and brought us a real peace that He had not abandoned us and that this was the church He wanted us to be a part of.

In the years that followed we grew in our relationship with God and with the fellowship in NCF. We saw God bless the church in many ways, the provision through prayer of a minibus to take our young people to Poland on a mission trip and the provision, following a time of prayer and sacrificial giving of our first building in Coton Road being perhaps the two biggest but we saw God's hand on many smaller things as well as we needed them. God met all of our needs both large and small as we tried our best to follow His plan and purpose for NCF and lifted our needs to Him in prayer.

Was it all smooth sailing, it would be lovely to say yes, but in church life as in our own lives, it is not all smooth sailing and there have been occasions over the years when as a leadership and a church we have had to turn to God in prayer and ask Him to show us the way once more as we have strayed a little from His path.

Around about the year 2000 we had the not unpleasant problem that the building we were in was getting too small for the size of congregation we were getting and really felt God wanted us to move into something bigger so that He could continue to grow His church that was NCF. We spent a number of months in prayer as a church and visited several buildings around the town testing to see if they were where God wanted us to go. We held morning services in some of them. But somehow we knew they were not quite right.

We became aware that this building was vacant and had been for many months following the unfortunate demise of the church who had previously met here. We approached the remaining trustees and what followed was an amazing example of how God leads us to where He wants us to be. We had nowhere near the market value of the building to offer but offered what we had and to our surprise it was accepted, not only accepted but the trustees told us to hold back £10,000 to start our ministry on the estate.

We were over the moon as you can imagine and gave thanks to God for His amazing provision but He wasn't finished yet. The trustees were going on an Alpha Holy Spirit weekend that weekend and on the Monday telephoned us to ask for a further meeting. We, or certainly I, thought Oh, Oh

they've had second thoughts. As it turned out God had spoken to each of the trustees separately in their prayer times over the weekend and when they got together it was the same message. " I want you to give the building to NCF." and this was the reason for the second meeting. It was a hard offer to refuse and actually freed up cash resources to carry out vital maintenance work on the structure and to redecorate the entire building including replacing the roof which was leaking badly. It is no exaggeration to say there were mushrooms growing out of the inside walls of some rooms! It would have taken many months of fund raising to do this if God hadn't stepped in.

Our vision when we moved in was to make it a place not only of worship but also that reached out into the local community around us and served their needs as well. When we moved in there was one group meeting once a fortnight and so we prayed that God would help us to connect with groups that served the community and that we could partner with in making God's house available and giving us opportunity to witness for Him to them.

God was not slow in answering our prayers. He had given us the building for a purpose and we, having prayed long and hard, believed that outreaching into the community was part of that purpose.

The church established an "Outlook" group for people on the estate to attend and find fellowship and hear about God. This, following the building of our new kitchen where God's answers to prayer were numerous and amazing, became the luncheon club that we see today. A vision was given to start a "Mums and Tots" group which has grown into Sunshine Corner the evidence of which is smiling out at you from the wall over there. A what is affectionately called "Vicar's tea party" that started because Coniston Court flats had no communal room and we offered to be their communal room so they could socialise together, it has since grown and flourished.

A less contemporary evening service was started following God's prompting and is still flourishing today.

In addition God brought to us a number of groups who indeed serve the local community in many and varied ways and different age groups. We have an Alzheimer's support group run by Age UK, a rainbows, brownies and guides troop, a Children's sensory group, a Women's Institute, a holiday and Social group who also raise funds for local charities, a bereavement group. We have had other groups over the years but these have unfortunately stopped for various reasons. But God has always brought along a group to replace them, just at the right time.

I emphasise that God has brought them because our prayer and vision was that the building would be used every day of the week and not just stand here empty. God heard that prayer and I can honestly say that all the community groups who are or have used the building approached us , some looking for temporary accommodation, some having to move from previous buildings. All have stayed and all remark on the wonderfully warm sense of family and love that pervades the building.

I truly believe that without prayer none of this would have happened. Prayer is the bedrock of our faith. If we are not a praying people how can we expect God to hear us and respond? If we are not a praying people how different are we to any other group of people that meet together to socialise. Prayer is part of our DNA as much as breathing is.

I believe that God will continue to honour our prayer to reach out into the community through the various groups that meet here and will continue to bring new groups along as they are needed but I also think and believe that He has over the next few years a different vision for us to fulfil for Him.

I believe that John was revealing part of that vision a few months ago when he spoke about filling the empty chairs that sit over there in the corner. I believe that God wants to do that and the new estates that are being build around us are a spring board into making that a reality.

John and I have both had pictures in recent weeks of having to turn the church chairs around and open the dividing curtain to accommodate the numbers coming in. God answers prayer, but we need to listen for His voice to show us how.

Shortly we are going to praise God and pray together. My prayer is that this would be the start of a time when we pray and seek God's leading with sincere hearts and are bold enough to follow where He leads us and that we will see the fruit of those prayers in the coming weeks and months.

Billy Graham is quoted as saying the best form of prayer is praise and worship. I want us to spend the next period of time doing that as we intersperse our prayers of praise and petition with worship through song.....