

From GLOOM to GLORY

A Programme of Prayer for the local Church

NOTES & PRAYERS

These pages consist of a series of –

Seven Sets of Notes and **Seven Prayer Sections**

The **Seven Sets of Notes**, while not closely linked to each prayer section, give an essential understanding of the spiritual realities which the prayers are dealing with. They touch on many aspects of the corporate spiritual life of which there is widespread ignorance, and should be read –and re-read – until you are thoroughly familiar with them.

The **Prayer Sections** are in a cycle of seven and should be used for anything from a fortnight to six months if you are praying for a local church in which the light of Christ seems to be burning low.

DAY 1 NOTES – HUMAN v. DIVINE

We will know many things about our local church in terms of the health of its finances, its health in terms of membership, and its health in terms of its buildings and plant. Money, numbers and material are familiar categories.

But just as they cannot adequately cover all the realities of an ordinary family, so they cannot adequately cover the realities of the local church.

[The word *church* has a number of meanings. Here I shall use it only of *people*: 'Church' with a big 'C' for the world-wide Body of Christ; 'church' with a small 'c' for the local Christian family. I shall call church buildings – buildings!]

If categories of money, numbers and material cannot adequately describe the Church/church, the '**spiritual**' category can, because the Church is a *spiritual* creation. It is God's not ours, and it is designed to serve his purposes not ours.

Peter 1:2 describes individual members of the Church/church as those who have been:

*...chosen and destined by **God the Father**
and sanctified by the **Spirit**
for obedience to **Jesus Christ**
and to be sprinkled with his blood.*

It is a gathering of such folk that make up the Church world-wide or local. It is this 'spiritual' view of the Church that is the basis of these Notes & Prayers.

We immediately hit a snag if we think about the Church in spiritual terms:

*- few Christians are actually used to **thinking** in spiritual terms !*

They use 'spiritual' language in their devotions, worship and proclamation, but by and large their thinking remains largely secular. It is very odd! – and it is why I shall keep a spiritual view to the fore in this writing.

There is another, more obvious, snag.

While humans seem to be basically religious, they don't naturally want to put God first, but themselves. This means that there is always a tussle going on in the Christian Church – past and present - between what they *should* be and how they actually *are*! St. Paul pinpointed it when he wrote in Romans 7:19:

I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.

The history of every church swings between glory and gloom; between God's enabling and human failure. Sometimes the Church/church is a light to the world and sometimes it can actually spread darkness.

When the latter happens, it may be that the church is in some way overshadowed by the past or in the grip of it. The past has an important place in the Christian Faith because it springs from

the first-century events of the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The past provides the Church's foundation – Jesus Christ.

It is right to be built upon God's action in the past, but wrong to have the pressures and patterns of human sin and distortion dictating to us from the past. When the latter happens, past patterns, assumptions and habits can rid the present of any chance of development and the future of any hope.

These Notes may take you into unfamiliar areas of Christian life because what I am calling the 'spiritual' is an area of life about which there is widespread ignorance.

Unfortunately, even total Christian commitment does not in itself automatically include a good grasp of the realities of the spiritual realm. Some of that has to be taught. (There is a slight parallel in the experience of a once-blind person who first sees a traffic light, but does not know – unless taught – what red and green *mean*. Sight and insight are two different things.)

DAY 1 – PRAYERS

Note that the pattern and style of the prayers will vary from day to day.

They reflect a typical pattern in the Christian life in which God does not allow us to think long about the weaknesses of others without illuminating our own!

As I mentioned at the beginning, the Prayers are written in a seven-day cycle, and should be repeated for anything up to six months. The printed words exist only to keep your attention disciplined and focused.

THOUGHT

**The Church was created to be one, pure and empowered:
but it can be sinful, split and powerless
when we use the church to serve ourselves, not its master.**

PRAYERS

1. Say the **Lord's Prayer** *phrase by phrase* with a pause between each to give you time to catch-up with its meaning and implications.
2. Heavenly Father, for all the Christians whose faithful lives have sustained and enlarged your church down the centuries.
I thank you

For the Christian heritage I have entered, with its riches and its freedoms,
and its signs of your presence and power.

I thank you

For the church for whom I pray, and for all signs within it of your holiness,
your love, and your salvation.

I thank you

On those followers of Christ who through weakness or disobedience,
have failed you, and the Christian family.

Lord, have mercy

On those who have adopted the name of Christ
but who have never set out to serve him.

Lord, have mercy

On Christians who regard your church primarily in terms of personal status
or as an arena to exercise personal power.

Lord have mercy

Lord Spirit, enlighten us afresh, that we may know the father's purpose in Christ's church,
and see again what it is meant to be.

Come Lord Spirit

Breathe afresh upon your church to bring divine life and power,
freedom from fear, and freedom from evil.

Come Lord Spirit

Where past patterns of human sin and habits cripple Christ's army
and make hearing his Word difficult and obeying him unlikely.

Come Lord Spirit

3. To God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit be praise and glory this day.

Lord God, use these our prayers,
forgive and heal the weakness of our seeing,
but acknowledge our wisdom in asking.
Work in us that which we wish to see in others,
that we and they may be one in Christ,
and be his obedient soldiers and servants unto our lives' end.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Jottings -

DAY 2 NOTES – SPIRITUAL SOLUTIONS

Spiritual problems require spiritual solutions.

Just as financial problems require financial solutions, so :

spiritual problems require spiritual solutions.

It is here that the widespread inability of Christians to think *spiritually* becomes most obvious and most disastrous.

Guilt, for instance, is a widespread *spiritual* problem. The pain it causes may be temporarily eased by drugs or drink or therapy or medicine, but being a *spiritual* problem, it requires a *spiritual solution*. So it needs the spiritual realities of repentance, forgiveness and enabling grace to deal with it.

So if something is wrong with a local Christian community, the *spiritual* area should be the first to be tackled – not the last! It is worth repeating that spiritual problems require spiritual solutions.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control

[Galatians 5:22]

While they are human qualities, in the church in particular, they become enhanced as 'fruits' of the Holy Spirit. They are a spiritual blessing.

In the same way, when in the church they get replaced by their opposites, *hatred, anger, bitterness, resentment, intolerance*, etc., it is good to be alerted to the fact that they may be being enhanced by evil spiritual forces, that fan them into flames. Evil needs the distortions of human sin and weakness to latch on to. (Which is why Satan could have no power, claim or hold over Jesus - John 14:30.)

Where evil may be around we must be careful to note the following:

As Christians we can take authority and bind evil, but we should never bind people to whom God has given free will.

(It is the devil who binds people to their sins and habits; it is the Church's ministry to *free* them!)

We cannot, therefore, 'bind' people because we think them a nuisance – however much we would so dearly love to!

Our ministry is to love them, and bind any evil that may be driving them to act against their true selves.

Just as frequent prayer can bring a great sense of peace to a place, so anger, mistrust, jealousy, and so on can infect a home or a church building.

In Christian homes and churches prayers of cleansing and protection should be made regularly, and maintained by way of a 'disinfectant'.

In churches set aside for the worship of God, and in which God's living presence and power are meant to be experienced, such prayers appropriately – *'prepare the way of the Lord'*.

Before every gathering of Christians the Angel Guard prayer (below) – or its formal or informal equivalent - ought to be offered for the people and the place.

**Visit, we beseech you, O Lord, this place*,
and drive from it all the snares of the enemy;
let your holy angels dwell herein to preserve us in peace;
and may your blessing be upon us evermore;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

* church / plane / ward / car / home /room / etc.

Any reader who lacks a robust theology of angels – and many will – may wish (as I tend to do) to pray the words **may Christ's Risen Presence dwell herein**. (If the Lord knows that the prayer will be best answered by delegating his angels to do the job – that's fine with me!)

The point at issue is not our angel-ology or our lack of it, but our knowledge and trust in God that he wills to bring us peace and protection, cleansing and freedom.

DAY 2 - PRAYERS

Pray these prayers firstly *for yourself*.

1. Lord's Prayer

2. Heavenly Father,

I long that my life, through the fruits of the Holy Spirit, should be transformed to be like Christ himself.

Deliver me from evil past and evil present.

From the past that nothing may now darken
or distort my life that belongs to past times.

Free me from any negative over-shadowings due to the weakness or sin of others, or to evil around or within them.

Risen Lord,

As you came through locked doors to those dominated by fear,
to give them your peace and to breathe upon them the Holy Spirit,
so come afresh into the depths of my life
that my fear may be replaced by peace,
and my behaviour and attitudes transformed for your service.

Spirit of Jesus,

Be breathed freshly upon me, that the human 'fruits' of ...*strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions* and *envy* [Galatians 5:20] may be banished, together with any evil that is encouraging them.

Replace them by your *love, your joy, your peace, your patience, your kindness, your goodness, your faithfulness, your gentleness, your self-control*, that people may encounter the Risen Christ himself in me.

3. Now, have a notebook and pencil handy and jot down anything that comes to mind as you pray relating to yourself/church. Later offer it in prayer.

4. Once you have gone through today's Prayers in relation to yourself, return to them, think of the church for whom you are praying, and go through them with the *church* as the subject of your prayer.

There's no need to go to the hassle of changing the words (unless you are using them in public). Your intention for the church will make them effective.

DAY 3 NOTES – PARALYSIS vs. MOVEMENT

From Matthew 9 -

*When Jesus saw their faith
he said to the paralytic
'Take heart, son,
your sins are forgiven.'*

This comes from the well-known story that is so often seen as a model for our prayers of intercession: the paralytic carried by his friends to Jesus for what turned out to be not only his cure but his release.

Like so many today, they were probably only aware of the paralysis – that was visible and needed *healing*, but not aware of his bondage to sin that was invisible and needed *forgiveness*. Jesus discerned the invisible spiritual reality.

The aim of evil is to destroy the Church, or, if it cannot manage that, to paralyse it – for that comes to the same thing!

Any church can become paralysed by human sin (encouraged by evil), so both *human sin* and *evil* may have to be tackled if the church is to live and grow.

What sins most beset the Church?

The most common sins among religious people are *religious sins*.

Sadly Christians usually so over-emphasise *moral sins* (and can spot them a mile off) that what I am calling *religious sins* can go on around them unnoticed!

I will take an example of a fictitious male church Treasurer. (I could have chosen a male or female, an organist/minister /choir mistress/ scout leader/ vicar/ leader of the flower rota/ sacrist/ lay-reader/ warden/ verger/ Sunday School leader/ church-building cleaner/ secretary/ etc, etc, etc, etc, etc.!))

Suppose a Mr. Moneypenny lapses *morally*, and gets reported in the local paper. Church members might, in 'righteous indignation', demand his resignation.

But if Mr. Moneypenny regularly commits a *religious sin* – only a few will recognise it for what it is! Let's imagine Mr. Moneypenny not honouring God's name, not serving God's kingdom, and not doing God's will. Instead he honours his *own* name, establishes his *own* dictatorship, and imposes his *own* will as if the church belonged to *him*! Such a person can use God's money to boost himself, to increase his status, and to wield power. He, not God, will hold the church's reins, and the direction of the church will not be God's vision for it, but Moneypenny's plans to ensure and safeguard his own status and the survival of his 'kingdom.'

Mr. Moneypenny will not have horns and hooves and smell of sulphur! On the contrary, Mr. Moneypenny will, as likely as not, have a band of loyal Christian allies who probably unwittingly support his regime which will ultimately result in paralysing God's church. Other Christians **see his moral uprightness, his scrupulous honesty, his obvious sincerity, his**

kindness, his gentlemanly manners and assume that any Christian with a moral and honest life must serve God's purposes, and cannot possibly, therefore, be used as the devil's instrument to bring spiritual paralysis and death to God's church.

(That is quite unbiblical and total nonsense!)

Evil will do everything to consolidate Moneypenny's kingdom because it is not on God's side. The Devil will not need to train evil spirits to try and strangle the local church, since – as long as Mr. Moneypenny is active – the church's Treasurer (in this particular example) will strangle the church for him! It happens!

Some readers will recognise all that straight away – and perhaps even have in mind someone who in their own way is the equivalent of Mr. Moneypenny. Others may want to dismiss my interpretation as far-fetched.

Whatever your view, just reflect on the one to whom Jesus said:

"You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church." [Matthew 16:18]

Just five verses later,

Jesus turned and said to Peter:

"Get behind me Satan!

You are a stumbling-block to me."

Jesus was not blinded to *spiritual* sin. He knew the nature of what was operating behind and through Peter, and took authority to expose and separate Satan from Peter - his chosen leader. Jesus did not take the view – nor should we – that nice Christian folk cannot be evil instruments in his church. They are the devil's prime targets in his strategy to fight the Church. Peter's sin was no sin at all to most Christians ‘...**you are setting your mind not on divine things but human things**’ – i.e. thinking humanly not *spiritually*!

DAY 3 – PRAYERS

1. Lord's Prayer
2. Heavenly Father,
Forgive me if at any time I have used the church and its fellowship to establish my own little kingdom or to serve myself.
Forgive me when I have assumed that thinking *spiritually* was optional.
Forgive me the times when I have given my assent and support to merely human programmes and decisions which have diverted the church from your true purposes.
Forgive me when I have been a distorting influence in your church or have aligned myself with such influences.
Forgive me when I have put human approval and acceptance before listening to you and obedience.
Help me to forgive those of whom I am critical or who have hurt me.

Lord Christ,
You have always had such hopes and plans for me.
Release me from any sin – whether my own or of others –
that might begin to paralyse my life,
my discipleship and my service.

‘The dearest idol I have known,
whate'er that idol be,
help me to tear it from thy throne
and worship only thee.’

Lord break my religious idols and their hold on me,
that I may enter into the 'perfect freedom' of your service.

Lord, break all wrong bonds that hold me, of whatever nature.

Speak your words of forgiveness and of release
that I may rise up and
walk forward with Christ
into his resurrection Life.

‘Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest* in thee.’

* selves / light / life / hope, etc.

Lord Spirit of Jesus,

‘Heal our wounds, our strength **renew**;
on our dryness **pour** your dew;
wash the stains of guilt away;
melt the frozen, **warm** the chill,
bend the stubborn heart and will¹;
guide the steps that go astray.’

3. Now reflect on the Spirit's work highlighted by the words in thick type.
 - **heal**
 - **renew**
 - **wash**
 - **melt**
 - **warm**
 - **bend**
 - **guide.**

4. Continue your intercession by praying for the church and using the prayers to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit written above.

(As before, there is no need to change the wording. As you identify with the church that God has placed on your heart, your 'I' will become 'them' in your heart – which is where your prayer will be coming from!)

¹ I have transposed the lines of this couplet, since 'melting' and 'warming' come before 'bending', and I have changed 'thy' to 'your'.

DAY 4 NOTES – AGENTS & IDOLS

Following on from the account of St. Peter, it needs to be said that any Christian who does not think that they can be an agent of Satan is placing him/herself on a pedestal higher than the Chief Apostle!!

It would be sheer arrogance were it not for the fact that it usually arises out of spiritual blindness.

Of course **I** can be used by Satan, and **you** too!

A failure to recognise the possibility makes it –

- a) unlikely that we can discern it in others
- b) unlikely that we shall so order our lives as to make it less probable.

Religious sin is serious, it can **dominate** and **divide** – and these are two major characteristics of **evil**.

'Dominate' comes from the word 'Lord' and *spiritual sin* results in Christ's Lordship being undermined, ignored, denied, or replaced.

'Dividing' is the work of the '*Diabolos*' – devil – whose name means to *throw- apart*.

It is not that difficult to spot either *domination* or *division* in the Church.

Spiritual sin can destroy the church's vision, throttle its initiative, stunt its growth, and even kill it off as God's instrument of salvation (although it may – with barely a ripple – become a successful social club!)

Christians nowadays tend to play down 'sin' as if it were an optional religious word instead of something that indicated a terrible reality.

Their widespread unfamiliarity with sin is partly because 'self-examination' and confession are thought to be old-fashioned and/or unnecessary. My failure to recognise my own tendency towards religious sins prevents my discerning them in the life of my local Christian community.

I have already referred to St. Peter being the instrument of Satan.

It is significant that Christ promptly exposed the Satanic source of St. Peter's sin, a sin which would have passed unnoticed in almost every Christian meeting. Jesus explains to Peter just what it was:

for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.

St. Peter's sin lay in his thinking, and in his unwillingness to do what I have been stressing i.e. to *think spiritually* – and share God's view.

St. Peter learned the embarrassing way that to *think spiritually* is not optional!

For many this area is a 'different ball game' from what usually goes on in church. Many church councils do not demand of their membership the ability to *think spiritually*, nor do the councils

require it of their leaders. St. Peter's *setting his mind on human things* would not, I think, set him apart in an average decision-making council of a local or even national church.

Our religious sins tend to gravitate around three realities of life.

1. Humans feel *secure* when things are *static*.
2. Christians have a tendency to *worship*.
3. Christians appreciate the *Good Things of God*.

1. It is a human trend to take living things and make them *static* in order to feel more *secure*.
2. Christians have a tendency to worship, so are much more likely to fall into sins of false-worship (idolatry) than those who seem not to worship anything.
3. God's good gifts feature large in the life of any Christian. The devil's strategy is to inflate so that they feature *too largely*. When this happens the *things of God* come between us and God and can become our focus and our goal.

It is as if a King or Queen wished to see you and sent a car to collect you, but the car was so nice that you opted to stay in it and not meet your sovereign! Daft I know, but I also know that the truth of that analogy is an everyday occurrence!

Every good thing of God, every item of the Christian life that we appreciate – the Bible, the sacraments, our history, our tradition, our leaders, our form of church government, our favourite Christian authors, our method of praying, our style of music, the saints, our programme, our worship, our liturgy - **anything** can come between us and God. Everything we love can become **idol**-ised.

DAY 4 – PRAYERS

1. Lord's Prayer

2. Pause,
Think quietly which things of God mean the most to you.
3. List them.
4. Put a Cross by
 - any that have become too large
 - any that are not held in balance with other things
 - any that have begun to dominate your choices
 - any that cause division
 - any that you take pride in
 - any which give you security or status
 - any which drive you to intolerance of others
 - any which decrease your love and your peace.

NOTE: We live in different situations and have different callings. It is quite possible for one of God's great gifts to play a major part in our lives but for it not to dominate us, or come between us and God.

Let's take two examples:

A Bible translator may out of love for his/her Lord spend his/her life studying Scripture to make its message available to save others.

The Bible in the life of another person may occupy the same amount of time but his/her motive is purely to wage theological war against other Christians, and to enjoy apparent superiority over them.

The first serves others and is motivated by love – and is good.

The second serves self and is motivated by pride – and is evil.

5. Heavenly Father,

Forgive me for the times when my gratitude and love of the things you have given your Church have led me to inflate them beyond their rightful size.

Forgive me when I have used the church not to find security in you, but in aspects of its life, particular in position and status.

Forgive me, Father, if I have viewed your corporate instrument for the world's salvation merely as a social club for the religious.

Lord Jesus Christ,

I recognise afresh my calling as your soldier and servant.

Help me to look to you alone as the author and finisher of my faith.

Help me to glory in nothing except your Cross.

Free me from the false-worship of Christian things.
Strip me free from anything of Christian culture that ensnares me, and
which I have allowed/might allow to dominate me.

For you *alone* are the Lord.
You *alone*, O Christ, with the Holy Spirit
are most high in the glory of God the Father.

Lord Jesus have mercy upon us, sinners that we are.

Holy Spirit,
With Christians of every age we ask you to come.

Come as water to cleanse, and as fire to burn.

Open our eyes to our false gods, that we may renounce them.
Cleanse our hearts from all misguided and distorted worship.
Consume with fire our tendency to idolatry that we may be free
and worship in Spirit and in Truth.

6. Now, with the church for whom you are praying in mind, pray the prayer
above that you had prayed for yourself.

(As before, there is no need to get tied-up in re-wording it.)

DAY 5 NOTES – SINCERITY & FAITHFULNESS

Christians are easily fooled by sincerity. To some it is all that matters, no matter that the person may be sincerely *wrong*!

There are two sorts of sincerity. They might be distinguished by calling them –

Christian sincerity

and

Sincerity about Christian things.

Christ-ian sincerity must, of course, centre on Christ. It will be marked by a willingness to serve him at all costs. It will be rooted in a complete trust in God's faithfulness, and marked by an openness to the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work (i.e. making holy) in a life that will show his 'fruits' of love, joy, peace, etc.

Mere **sincerity about Christian things** may be totally different.

It may – in contrast – have nothing *whatsoever* to do directly with Christ!

There are those who have the deepest and **sincerest** love for Christian things: Christian history/ tradition/ music/ architecture/ literature/ denomination/ doctrine/ worship/ fellowship, etc and etc. but who wouldn't recognise Christ if they saw him, and wouldn't think of following him even if they did!

The situation is made all the more confusing in the West by the cultural ease by which a person can call themselves a 'Christian' on the basis of geography rather than religion, i.e. holding a British passport or residing in the U.K.!

Sincerity that is merely **about Christian things** differs radically from what I have called '**Christian sincerity**'. Those who are merely sincere about Christian things can often be recognised by their lack of love, lack of joy, and lack of peace. They believe that they are right and that everyone else is wrong; they cannot listen to others, cannot absorb new truths, are totally rigid in their religious pattern, consistently bring division, and resent any approach or dialogue that might pose a threat to their own little religious 'kingdom'.

True **Christian sincerity** is able to bring with it a lightness of touch because the person's security is grounded in God who is unchanging. Those who look for security in Christian *things*, have to fight daily to try and retain it – and it shows!

Let's look now at **faithfulness**. Moral adultery is fairly easy to detect, and so is **religious adultery** (i.e. *un-faithfulness*) once you know what to look for.

Just as **faithfulness** in marriage should exclude other sexual relationships, and becomes broken when they are indulged in, so, in a similar way, faith in Christ requires a **spiritual faithfulness** which excludes indulging in other spiritualities – however promising they seem to be. Folk nowadays will accuse Christians of being 'intolerant' if they say Christ demands faithfulness.

For the Christian, God intends that his/her sufficiency should be found in the Fatherhood of God, in the service of the Saviour and in the power of the Spirit. Other spiritualities may offer alleged insight into the **future**, alleged contact with the **dead**, **mystery** and **secrecy**, the promise of **power** and of **cure**.

God does not intend us to see *the future* for he knows that that makes trusting him even more difficult than it is already!

God plans eternal life for us, something that far surpasses mere 'contact' with alleged *dead*. Christians have fellowship with all who are '**in Christ**' whether past or present. Such Communion with all Saints is not psychic but spiritual.

Semi-religious organisations can offer the one-up-manship of *secrecy* and/or the 'buzz' of *darkness*, but secrecy and darkness are not God's style. He opts to reveal himself and give us light – and there's Christmas and Easter to prove it.

Some movements seem to offer limited *power* but power plus our innate selfishness are a dangerous combination. God's purpose for the Christian is to keep the power in his *own* hands where it is safe and make it apparent when we are weak. Then he can use it through us, rather than leaving us to mishandle it!

Occult movements can offer *cure*, but they cannot offer wholeness. Improve-ment at one level of the personality comes at the expense of deterioration at another. Physical health gets traded for sickness at another level of life: spiritual/ moral/domestic. God's plan for us is greater than cure, it is wholeness and holiness. He designed us as whole beings and treats us not as parts, but as people.

So, when God requires religious *faithfulness* it is because it is in our own interests. Our faithfulness to Christ must be total. Evil encourages us to 'use our right' to pick 'n' mix the content of our religion as the fancy takes us. And it certainly does take us - into fog, muddle and ineffectiveness. It results in thinking that humankind does not need 'saving' from 'sin'; so a Saviour becomes unnecessary; the Cross optional, and Christ's 'Lordship' is denied. That is evil.

DAY 5 – PRAYERS

NOTE : **Repetition** in prayer and in praying need not be 'vain' repetition, or I would not have suggested it for this seven-day cycle. There is every reason that it should be positive and meaningful, and not in vain.

If you are driving a screw deeply into a piece of wood, you do not stop after the first turn, but continue – however difficult or (forgive the pun) however 'boring'!

You continue, knowing that:

each turn takes the screw forward and deeper.

It is similar with this – or any other – cycle of prayer. At the end of the first cycle it will be almost impossible for you to still to be at the same place where you began – you will have moved significantly deeper into God and closer to the mind of Christ.

When you begin these Prayers for their second, third, fourth...tenth time the same thing will be happening. The movement may at times be imperceptible to you, but that does not mean that it is not taking place!

Do not feel that you are badgering God to do something that he otherwise would not wish to do were it not for your efforts.

The wording of the Prayers will move you – and those for whom you pray – into deeper areas of forgiveness, to enjoy greater freedom, to hold clearer convictions, or, in the words of St. Richard of Chichester –

- to know God more clearly,
- love him more dearly, and
- follow him more nearly.

PRAYERS

Each Prayer section has begun with the **Lord's Prayer** not because of any slavish compulsion to be liturgical or unease with the informal, but because it rates as the most authoritative, the most perfectly balanced, and the most concise expression of Christian living, and a tool to accomplish it.

Spend most of your Prayer time today reminding yourself of the Lord's Prayer –

It re-establishes our two main priorities

1. **It puts God first**
2. **It puts ourselves second and in dependence upon him.**

In the *first* section:

- it reminds us and re-establishes God as our Father.
- it reminds us and re-establishes that life is not about promoting ourselves (our 'name'), but honouring and promoting God's.
- it reminds us and re-establishes our role in the army of the King of Kings.
- it reminds us and re-establishes our position of obedience to fight for the extension of his rule (the 'coming' of his Kingdom).
- it reminds us and re-establishes that our role is one of obedience.
- it reminds us and re-establishes that life is not the imposition of our will, but the doing of God's will.

Having re-established our right relationship with God it then reminds us and re-establishes God's relationship to us.

In its *second* section:

- it reminds us and re-establishes that it must be to him that we look for our day-by-day needs.
- it reminds us and re-establishes the fact that only in our relationship with God do we have the answer to our guilt.
- it reminds us of our guilt, and thereby opens us to, and re-establishes, God's divine forgiveness in our lives.
- it reminds us that we ought to extend to others the grace of forgiveness that God offers to us.
- it reminds us and re-establishes God's leading in our lives, that he would so govern our choices that we are kept clear of danger.
- it reminds us and re-establishes the fact that we live in a fallen world, in the grip of evil, and that God offers us deliverance from it.

These are twelve practical reasons why we should rush to pray it!

Every Christian will know that in practice those who do *not* use the Lord's prayer never cover all of the above, however long their extempore alternatives become. **Jesus put everything in a workable easy-to-remember nutshell for us, and it includes deliverance from evil. We should not discard so mighty a weapon.**

If you're the sort of person who doesn't want to waste time, then you'll appreciate that in the form Jesus taught it, it takes less than *half a minute!*

DAY 6 NOTES – GOD ALONE

I realise that the Notes & Prayers make this an unusual format.

My intention – not to say conviction – was that each would make the other more real. The prayers without the truths and insights that lie behind them in the teaching could seem empty and irrelevant. I hope the wording of the prayers strikes you both as *full* and *relevant*.

The Notes have only touched on some of the spiritual themes that arise when we begin to discern the reality of the spiritual world.

A theme that cannot be allowed to pass without mention is **God's removing (or allowing to be removed) from us the things we treasure most.**

I have said enough for you to guess why. It is probably related to the fact that we might be in danger of relying on them not on God himself.

This removal of things is one of the most alarming events to occur in spiritual blessing and growth. It can be devastating if there is not an understanding that it may be God's way of preventing or breaking our enslavement.

The removal of such things that help prop-up our spiritual lives is akin to a child's first bike which has not only its two main wheels but can have two little supportive wheels either side at the back to stop it falling over and to encourage it to go straight. These are supplied simply as a teaching aid: they are purchased in order that they should, in due course, be removed!

God, it seems, can take a similar view of the things that give us spiritual support.

I remember (early in my ministry) having the pastoral care of a Christian for whom daily Holy Communion was the norm. That was fine as long as it was available, but my job was to strengthen her for her future – whatever that might bring. Seeing that she was in danger of becoming over-dependent on the sacrament daily, I actually advised her to manage with it less often – an unusual activity for a priest! She then moved to a parish with a totally different style and pattern of worship where daily communion was not possible. Her spiritual life did *not* collapse because her flexibility which I had tried to encourage had saved her from becoming over-reliant on a particular pattern which she loved.

Enjoying the good things of God when they are available is right, but be wary of assuming that tomorrow's gifts will be the same as yesterday's.

The secret is to live each day at a time so that the gifts that *do* come our way remain always a fresh surprise. In this way our gratitude for what God gives today will not be soured by our resentment or disappointment that he did not repeat the gifts of yesterday !

To maintain a degree of continuity and stability local churches have inevitably to be strongly influenced by what has been. The problem is that it is easy for them then to assume that – almost as of right – they are entitled today to what God gave them yesterday.

God is sovereign, and his gifts are his to give or to withhold, according to his present purposes and plans for us. God is not fickle – but he does know that we and our situations change, and that what is appropriate for growth at one time may not be at another. Mothers do not replace their child’s old school uniform with another of the same size!

Wesley's wonderful Prayer used at the Commendation of a Missionary is applicable to every Christian and every church community. It has that right degree of flexibility and detachment which lifts the Christian *above* the level where the things get out of proportion and enslave us. It puts things into proportion and sets us free!

Lord God, I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing, put me to enduring;
let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you;
let me be full, let me be empty;
let me have all things, let me have nothing;
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine, and I am yours. So be it.

DAY 6 – PRAYERS

1. **Lord's Prayer** – said with a pause between each section.

2. **Wesley's Prayer** (of course!!)

As on similar days –
Pray it firstly for yourself,

**Lord God, I am no longer my own,
but yours.**

**Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing,
put me to enduring;
let me be employed for you,
or laid aside for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty;
let me have all things,
let me have nothing;**

**I freely and wholeheartedly
yield all things
to your pleasure
and disposal.**

**And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine,
and I am yours.
So be it.**

3. Now turn your thoughts to the *church* for whom you are praying in this cycle of prayer, and to any *individuals* you know there.
Knowing that in such commitment as Wesley is demanding lies a peace that passes understanding and a security that the world cannot give –
pray for them.

DAY 7 NOTES – WARMTH & GROWTH

**Melt the frozen, warm the chill,
bend the stubborn heart and will.**

Writing this in the winter, my garden hose is near-freezing and cannot be unwound or be used. It is not useless, it merely requires warmth – which spring will bring – and then it will be able to be bent without breaking.

Some aspects of the church that appear dead, are only cold. Christians who confuse the state of being cold with being stone dead can cause great damage by their inappropriate reactions. Burial is one thing; revival quite another!

It is better initially to seek ways of applying **warmth** to the 'frozen' Christians so that their ice begins to thaw than it is to try and break their ice. (Cannot the shock waves of *breaking* ice kill fish in frozen fishponds?)

It is easy for Christians with one experience of Christian *life* to assume that a simple transfer of the things around their *living* experience (e.g. a certain form of worship/ pattern of prayer/ style of music, etc.) will bring that same rich experience to others. This only rarely happens.

Our excitement in having authentic Christian experience and growth can lead us to assume that all authentic Christian experience and growth must go along the same lines as ourselves. Not so – neither God nor we are that dull!

If Christian experience is about God and Us, then there is diversity at *both* ends of the equation.

There is immense diversity among people, but there is diversity within God himself – a range of 'person' that results in theologians speaking of God as being in Trinity. Put the two together and variety rules O.K.!

God is seen in terms of the **Father** who created the World, of his Son **Jesus Christ** who redeems humankind, and of the **Holy Spirit** who makes the Father and the Son and their work more real to us, and transforms us accordingly.

Christians often start by meeting God at their point of immediate need. Since these needs and situations differ greatly, their experiences of the God who meets them is *infinitely varied*. For some their first meeting starts around the Creator/Father, for others around the Son, for others around the Holy Spirit.

Whatever their place of 'entry' into God it is only the doorway in, it is not the goal of their faith. *Each will love the patterns of devotions that reflect and enhance their initial experience of God.*

God draws each Christian further into himself – and it is a life-long process. Ask a mature Christian to summarise their Christian life and it will be a growth into God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit – but not necessarily in that order.

But God does not intend the Christian life to stay at the **doorway** by which it was entered. It is as if God says: '**Come and see!**' and leads us closer into the members of the Trinity whom we know less well. Full Christian experience is of the **God beyond us**, the **God alongside us**, and the **God at work within us**. (There are – as you would expect - different patterns of worship, styles of architecture, streams of music, and modes of prayer – that reflect each of these.)

Because our Trinitarian God wants us to grow *fully* into him, it means that Christian growth in the local church is a Piccadilly Circus of **Christians all growing at different speeds and going in different directions!** Some being led forward in their experience of the Father, others of the Son, and others of the Holy Spirit. **Such multi-growth patterns should be expected; they are the Christian norm.**

[Some Christian groups which only gather the similarly-minded can be much simpler affairs to manage because they usually allow only *one* growth-pattern! The snags are (as folk who remain loyal to them over a long period tend to testify) that their spirituality remains 'thin', and that there is an in-built impoverishment that ultimately fails to reflect the full richness and generosity of God. Members of one growth-pattern communities can find Christians of 'multi-growth' communities more of a threat than an enrichment!]

In writing about Christian **growth** my hope is that readers will more readily identify with the concept of 'journeys into God', and so may be that much more sensitive to Christians whose journey is going at another pace or direction.

DAY 7 – PRAYERS

1. Lord's Prayer

2. Lord Jesus Christ,

I thank you that you came to deliver us from sin and death.

I thank you that on the Cross you acted in love for me.

I thank you that in your death I see the value your Father places on me.

Risen Lord

I thank you that you are able to come to the innermost areas of our lives.

I thank you that you bring peace, and show us your wounds in which are our healing.

I thank you that united with you, you take us from gloom to glory.

Creator God,

I thank you for all that reflects your greatness in the church and the world.

I thank you for all glimpses of your greatness, and for the assurance of your overall ordering in the world and in human lives.

I thank you that in your greatness I discover my smallness and my need to grow in dependence upon you, for my daily needs and my protection.

Father God,

I thank you that through Jesus I can come to you as to a perfect Father.

I thank you that however great I glimpse you to be, that you want me to know you personally as my Father and my Shepherd.

I thank you that underneath me are your everlasting arms, and that your heart is full of compassion and mercy towards me, and great kindness.

Lord Spirit

I thank you that unseen and unheard you have led me closer to and into God.

I thank you that it is through you that I know God as Father and Jesus as Lord.

I thank you that it is through your enlightening and empowering that the living Christ meets me in Scripture, in Sacrament, and in fellowship.

Holy Spirit

I thank you that you work in us to make us holy so that we may obey Jesus.

I thank you for all the signs you give us in the church of your divine life.

Come afresh, in love and fire to make us holy and to make us whole.

Pray again the above prayer, which is about growing into God in Trinity, and pray it for the local church and for any individuals whom God has placed in your heart. Through your prayers they will find something of the warmth in his love.

CONCLUSION

Well, your seven-day cycle is at an end !

I urge you to continue it knowing that the process will draw you closer to God deeper into his love and nearer to his fire.

Any change within yourself – however seemingly small – will be used by God for others. As your love for the subjects of your intercession grows, so the love of God will flow freshly around them.

God has been longing to do this but as he chooses to work through us, so the prayers of yourself and others will 'prepare the way of the Lord'.

If you feel unable to continue this prayer-cycle, don't feel badly about it.

It is quite all right to drop it completely, or you may find that the pace of taking the cycle *monthly* suits you better. Share with your Christian leader/minister.

RELATED TEACHING

Teaching that is closely related to subjects mentioned here will be found on this website:

www.helpforchristians.co.uk

(If you don't need it, tell others!)

Among the **Articles** (which may be downloaded for free) are:

Evil's Strategy - Spiritual Warfare – Wilderness Experience - Freemasonry and the Church - The Essence of the Church - Praying and the Life of Prayer – Discernment – Growing Daily in the Spirit – Homosexuality and the Church – Evangelism, the Spiritual Key – But I Can't Pray Aloud! – Blessings: Helping to Retain Them

Among the **Hymns**:

Hymn for Protection & Peace – Healing God – Hymn to the Spirit.