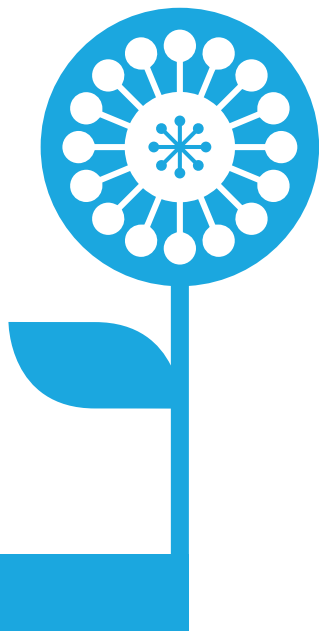


MONTH OF PRAYER AND FASTING

4 SEPTEMBER -
2 OCTOBER
2016



PREPARE THE WAY

INTRODUCTION

I was reading Luke's gospel the other day and I was struck by the poem Jesus quotes when He is talking about John the Baptist (Luke 7:27),

*"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you."*

At the time I had been praying that the Lord would prepare the way for some things I thought He had called us to do, particularly in Headingley. It then dawned on me that I had things upside down, again. I am meant to prepare the way for Him, not the other way around. It's up to us to discern what the Lord is doing, look where He is going, and then clear the rubble from the path so that He can come and do what He wants to do.

Tom Sine says, *"The call to follow Jesus is not a call to give our lives to the Western dream with a little devotional add-on ... It is not found in seeking life, but in giving our lives away."* Prepare the way will mean giving away – stepping away from the distractions and pleasures of this world and instead seeking the kingdom of God.

So, in September, I am inviting you to fast and pray for the whole month with this specific focus: Prepare the Way.

Preparing the Way means removing distractions so that we can hear and see what the Lord is doing; (2) preparing ourselves, our attitudes, our hearts and minds; (3) preparing our lives, our priorities; (4) preparing the church as a community of faith, ready to trust and obey.

For each week the **Prayer Guide** will provide: (1) an introduction to the theme, (2) a challenge to consider, (3) a scripture for us to read, ponder and meditate upon with the help of a short commentary. Then (4) there is some guidance as to how to pray. Finally, (5) there will be an action to take. You can spread the exercise over the week or do it all in one go or repeat it every day.

If you don't already write in a journal – this might be a good time to start. Just jot down your prayers and what you sense the Lord saying in reply. Make a note of decisions or questions or thoughts. If the Lord gives you a prophecy or a word of knowledge for the church or others, write it down. At the end of the month you can look back and see what He has been saying to you and through you.

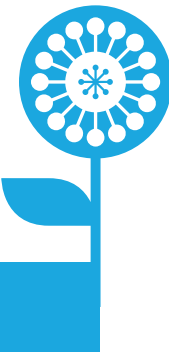
In the **Notes For Joining In Prayer** there will be a range of suggestions for praying on your own and with others – it is a glorious thing to be able to reach out to the Lord alongside those who are on the same kingdom adventure as us, so please do join in if you can.

In **Notes For Joining In The Fasting** you will find notes about fasting your phone for the month. You can find other guidance on fasting on the website: just search for "fast".

And then on Sunday 2 October we will give time to hearing from everyone about what the Lord has been saying and doing.

David Flowers

PREPARE THE WAY



NOTES FOR JOINING IN PRAYER

Here are some ways you can join in prayer with everyone else this month. Keep an eye open for other opportunities to pray together too.

1. 10 minutes a day to prepare the way
2. A (very) small group to keep in the loop
3. The Spirit is there in Engine room prayer
4. Breakfast and prayer to help us prepare

1. 10 minutes a day to prepare the way

Each week the prayer diary gives you (1) an introduction to the theme for the week, (2) a challenge to consider, (3) a scripture for to read, ponder and meditate upon with the help of a short commentary. Then (4) there is some guidance as to how to pray. Finally, (5) there will be an action to take – mainly with your very-small-group (see below).

You can spread the exercise over the week or do it all in one go or repeat it every day.

Start a journal and keep a note of what He says each day.

2. A (very) small group to keep in the loop

I'd like you to find one or two or three people whom you can keep in touch with and share what it is that the Lord is saying to you as you pray during this month – and also to pray for each other. You can do this over a telephone call or text or message (oh, the irony!). If you need a bit of help finding people please chat to a growth group leader.

3. The Power is there in Engine Room prayer

On the evenings of Tuesday 6 and Sunday 25 September we'll gather at Headingley Methodist. On a ship the forward propulsion comes from the engine room. It's not necessarily a very comfortable place but it releases power. In the same way, our prayer together directs, propels and powers us forward as we prepare the way.

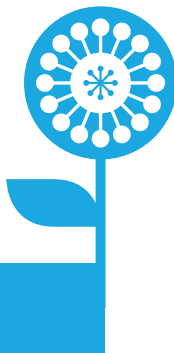
4. Breakfast and prayer to help us prepare

The new offices in Headingley will be open from 7.30am-8.30am if you would like to pop in and pray before you head off to work perhaps. (Please check the website for dates this is happening.)

Feedback

On Sunday 2 October we will share what the Lord has been doing in and amongst us as we prayed and fasted.

NOTES



PRAYER GUIDE

WEEK ONE 4 - 10 SEPTEMBER

Removing distractions from our lives so that we can hear and see what the Lord is doing.

Psalms 46:10 He says, *'Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.'*

I picture God watching us run around in circles, busy, busy, busy, praying as we go, "speak to me Lord, speak to me Lord". After a while He simply says, "Okay, but just stop for a minute, be still." When we do stop we are reminded of who He is, God. Many of us find it hard to stop and create a space in which we can hear the whisper of the Holy Spirit. But we also know that He is nearby. Tennyson wrote,

*Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.*

There are many distractions, not least our pinging, ringing, buzzing, gadgets. Whilst it would be silly to say that if we removed all such diversions from our lives we would instantly start to hear the Lord plainly, I think you'd agree that if you were to start from scratch in trying to sense the presence of the Holy Spirit clearly you would not fill it with smart phones, rushed car rides, TV and important hobbies! Hence our phone fast for this month.

Prepare the way by identifying what it is in your life that distracts you from hearing from God.

Scripture reading

1 KINGS 19:9-13

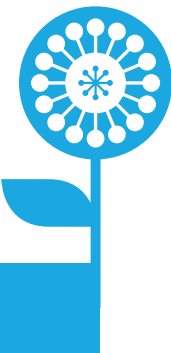
Elijah has just experienced God using him to do incredible miraculous things but then his circumstances change and he finds himself afraid and persecuted and depressed. Where is God? He was there in fire and rain and miracle and now seems far away. Eventually, crucially, life-changingly: Elijah hears God speak in a gentle whisper.

Prayer

This week as you meditate on this passage ask the Lord to expose the things and the emotions, actions or circumstances that get in the way of hearing His voice. Prepare the way by asking Him to help you deal with these distractions.

Action

Write down the disruptions which the Lord reveals to you and share them with your very-small-group. Ask them to pray for you to be able to deal with the distractions and begin to hear the Lord's voice more clearly.



PREPARE THE WAY

PRAYER GUIDE

WEEK TWO 11 - 17 SEPTEMBER

Preparing ourselves, our attitudes, our hearts and minds.

Last year when I went on a Greek refresher course (yes they exist and yes I did) I was confident that I'd pick it up quickly and soon be reading the bible a whole lot better. I found out pretty quickly that there was quite a lot of "refreshing" to do before I was going to get anywhere. I needed not just to refresh my memory but to deal with my attitude (pride) and application (laziness).

When the woman at the well met Jesus (John 4:7-15) and started plying Him with questions, she probably didn't expect Him to laser in on her lifestyle choices! Like me she too found herself in confessional mode pretty quickly.

The Lord is gracious in speaking to us despite our sin. Nevertheless, if we hang around Him for long, hoping to hear His voice and know His presence in our lives, we soon become aware that our attitudes, our hearts and minds can be a problem. They can get in the way.

Prepare the way by preparing yourself first. Is your faith an add-on or are you giving Him your whole life?

Scripture reading

PSALM 139

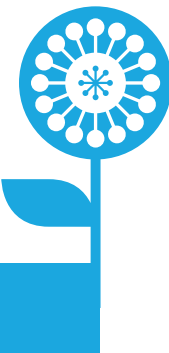
The wonder of the gospel is that the sin in our life isn't a barrier to Him because He comes to forgive and extend mercy. Although He has always known us and sees every minute and meter of our being, He is merciful. So we can read this Psalm and pray the prayer in verse 23, "search me and know me..." knowing that His answer will be one of grace.

Prayer

"The house of my soul is too small; enlarge it so You can enter in. It is ruins; repair it. There are things in it that must offend Your eyes; I confess this and know it. But who will cleanse it, or to whom can I cry for help, but You. Lord, cleanse me from my secret faults and spare me from the sins of others. I believe and therefore I speak." Augustine of Hippo, Confessions

Actions

James 5:16 instructs us to confess our sins to one another and to pray for one another so that we may be restored. Share and pray with your very-small-group.



PRAYER GUIDE

WEEK THREE 18 - 24 SEPTEMBER

Preparing our lives, our priorities.

Any pastor will tell you that you can tell a person's priorities by looking at their bank statement and their diary. Last month we were marvelling at the feats of our Olympians. I've been struck how often, in the interviews afterwards, they refer to the sacrifices they have had to make.

I suspect that Bradley Wiggins' diary has been full of competitions and training camps and that his bank statement probably revealed a penchant for lycra, energy bars and isotonic drinks. The priority was Gold. But interviewed after winning the medal he said that his children now needed a father and his wife a normal husband. A change in his priorities.

Jesus reminds us of his priority when he says that we should seek first His kingdom and then all "these" things will be given to us as well (Matthew 6:33).

If you wish to pursue God's purpose for your life your priorities may need to change. If we want to pursue God's purpose for our church, our individual and corporate priorities may need to change too.

Prepare the way by reviewing and re-setting our priorities.

Scripture reading

MATTHEW 6:19-34

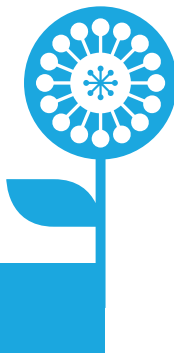
This passage is all about the direction in which you are facing – toward heaven or toward materialism and earth, toward light or toward darkness, toward the kingdom or toward a daily worry. Bradley was facing toward athletic achievement and he is now facing toward his family. Reflect on how you spend your time (look at your diary) and your money (look at your budget) and decide which way you are facing – is following Jesus an add-on or are you going to give Him your life?

Prayer

Open your diary and your bank statement or budget. Lay your hands on them each day this week and ask the Lord to reveal the priorities that make you face away from the kingdom, away from His purposes for you. Then ask Him to bless those parts which resonate with the kingdom.

Actions

Tell your very-small-group about what you spend the most money on and what you spend the most time on. Share about any changes you want to make in your priorities and what you think the Lord is saying to the church about our priorities.



PRAYER GUIDE

WEEK FOUR 25 SEPTEMBER - 1 OCTOBER

Preparing the church as a community of faith, ready to trust and obey.

The Vineyard is a relative newcomer to God's mission in Leeds and in Headingley. But we know that we have been given our part to play here and now. We are called to extend His kingdom, not just during the next few days but for many decades. Alongside other churches He is going to use us to build His church - against which the "gates of hell" will not prevail.

There is a rising tide of liberal, secular thought: where anything goes if you don't hurt someone; where tolerance is sacrosanct but a cheap obligation; where consumerism seeps into our lives like suncream in our suitcase; where celebrity is the controlling idolatry; and where the subtle mocking of the good and the true continues unabated.

Against all this God has ordained that the community of faith, the local church, is to be built into a bulwark in His kingdom mission. So, together, we give ourselves to this mission – following His instructions and empowered by His Holy Spirit.

St Paul tells us that pouring our lives into the local church, this bulwark against the enemy, is part of giving our lives to Jesus. And, when we do, it prepares the way for a transformation wrought by Him in ourselves and in our community. We learn about and re-assert the truth of the gospel; collectively we work out our priorities and how should we spend our time and money; together we learn how to pray - and He builds His church.

Prepare the way, trust and obey: what sacrifices are we willing to make? What risks are we willing to take?

Scripture reading

MATTHEW 16:13-20

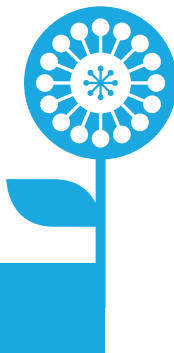
Jesus leads the disciples up into enemy territory. He chooses an environment of oppression and persecution to establish His identity and pronounce the purpose of the church and that it is made up of people. It is a war-like declaration. But our weapons are not ones of violence or aggression. As Martin Robinsons says, *"the nature of the church is to create the kind of community in which outrageous grace is lived out"*. (Planting Mission-Shaped Churches p94).

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help all who are members of your church to walk holy and without blame in everything. May we be the light of the world, a city set on a hill which cannot be hidden. May your light shine as we show faith by works and may others see by the whole direction of our lives that our hope is laid up in heaven. John Wesley, Sermon 64.

Action

Take a step of faith to change or to do something which will build the church. See if the Lord gives your very-small-group a prophecy or a word for the church – if so, email it to: david.flowers@leedsvineyard.org and/or share it on Sunday.



PREPARE THE WAY

NOTES FOR JOINING IN THE FAST

During our times of prayer and fasting I usually invite you to forego something of your choosing for just a week. This time I am inviting you to fast in a different way. Firstly, as you'll have guessed, I invite you to fast for a month. From 4 September until 2 October. Secondly, I am inviting everyone to "Fast your Phone".

FAST YOUR PHONE

As I have been thinking about preparing the way and asking, what are the obstacles and hindrances that stop us from hearing the whisper of the Holy Spirit, I have felt challenged to put aside one of the main means by which I get distracted: the smartphone. In the news a few weeks ago I heard about the open-banking app being launched to help us get better value out of the banking system - because "we live our lives through our smartphones" they said. And it's true, we do.

Whether it is playing games, checking the weather, hoping for a message, updating your status or planning your diary. It's not a bad thing, in many ways it's a good thing. But there's no denying that having a gadget pinging and buzzing is certain to distract us from others and most particularly from Jesus.

I don't expect you will remove the SIM card and go completely digitally free: that's like stopping breathing. But why don't you think about how the phone or tablet might impinge on your attentiveness to those around you (what I call digital diminuendo) or distract you from listening to the Lord and worshipping Him?

Here are a dozen ideas for how you could "Fast your Phone" during September (and maybe your tablet) in order to Prepare the Way. Choose one or more of these or think of a way that works better for you:

1. Turn it off for worship

Whenever you enter a devotional time, of bible reading or prayer or worship – on your own or in your growth group or at weekly worship - leave your phone at home (or at least turn it off).

2. Put it in the boot

When you are driving put the phone in the boot until you get to your destination. If you are on the bus or train or plane turn it off, put it at the bottom of the bag. Turn off the radio and use the time to think and pray and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you.

3. Read the Book

If you are in the habit of reading the bible on the phone, go back to the real thing for a month. It's hard to ponder when there are pings and postings popping up.

4. Leave it at home or in the office

When you have a lunch break or go for a walk or out for a drink, leave the phone at home or in the office so that you can give your attention to the world around and you and begin to hear what the Holy Spirit is telling you about it and how to pray.

5. Ground floor only

Don't take your phone up to your bedroom for a month. Let your last thoughts before sleep and your first thoughts when you wake be influenced by something else.

6. Waste your data allowance

Don't use mobile data for a month. Surf the net only when you can get wifi.

7. Image abstinence

Instead of taking pictures look and ask the Lord to speak through what you see. Take no photos for a month, write down what you think and feel instead.

8. Go into flight mode

Pretend you are flying – allocate a 4-hour period each day when you put the phone in flight mode.

9. Sync delay

Adjust your phone/tablet settings to synchronise and send notifications only once an hour, or every four hours, or even just once a day.

10. The marriage phone

If you are married, only take one phone with you when you are out and about together.

11. Phones and food don't mix

Turn the phone off when you sit down to eat. Leave it in another room. Enjoy the food with thankfulness. If you are with others, give them your full attention whilst you eat together.

12. Social Media Denial

Turn off your social media accounts for a month. Or, if that is too much, turn them off for certain hours each day (e.g. from 6.00pm until 9.00am).



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