

Study Guide, Term 2/2017

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VINTAGE PRAYER

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THE PRAYERS OF OLD TESTAMENT BELIEVERS

“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?”

(Deuteronomy 4:7 ESV)



Westminster Presbyterian Church
in Australia

Grace Community Groups

Each week across the Sunshine Coast, small groups from Grace Christian Church meet to

- study the Bible,
- pray together,
- worship God,
- encourage each other,
- care for one-another,
- grow together as followers of Jesus,
- laugh, cry, discuss life's big questions,
- and build lasting friendships!

If you're not part of a group yet, why not? It might take courage to join a group, or it might take a bit of personal rescheduling, but we promise that you won't regret it!



Area/Group Focus	Meeting time	Contact	Phone
Bli Bli	Sunday, 2.00pm	John Baird	(07) 5448 4040
Buderim	Monday, 7.00pm	Colin Weston	(07) 5476 9648
Day-time Mixed	Tuesday 9.30am	John Amos	0421 417 999
Kawana/Wurtulla	Monday (fortnightly), 7.00pm	Tim Richards	(07) 5438 2201
Caloundra	Wednesday, 7.15pm	Roger Anderson	(07) 5491 9442
Palmwoods	Wednesday, 7pm	Brad Joyce	0403 199 394
Nambour	Wednesday, 6.30pm	Garnet Lincoln	0421 286 188
Sippy Downs	Thursday, 7.00pm	Clint Lombard	0478 578 152
Woombye	Tuesday, 7.00pm	Cameron Blue	(07) 5442 3103
Young Mums	Tuesday, 10:30am	Jean Bowen-Jones	0402 746 533

Contents

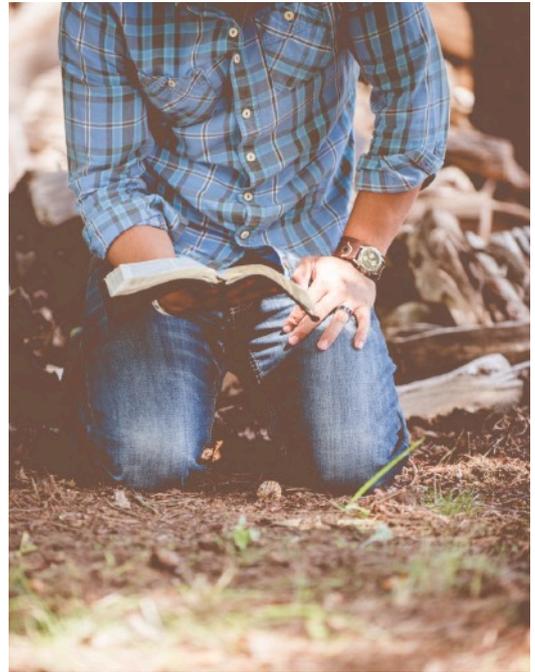
Introduction to the Study Guide	4
Reading the Old Testament	
How to use this study guide	
1. Praying For The First Time	7
Genesis 3:14-15 and 4:1-26	
Group Bible Study - Week 1	
2. Praying For A Change	13
Exodus 32:1-14	
Group Bible Study - Week 2	
3. Praying For Promises	19
2 Samuel 7:18-29	
Group Bible Study - Week 3	
4. Praying For Deliverance	25
Jonah 2:1-10	
Group Bible Study - Week 4	
5. Praying For Healing	30
2 Kings 20:1-11	
Group Bible Study - Week 5	
6. Praying For Understanding	35
Jeremiah 32:16-44	
Group Bible Study - Week 6	
7. Praying For Mercy	40
Daniel 9:1-24	
Group Bible Study - Week 7	
8. Praying For Success	45
Nehemiah 1:1 - 2:8	
Group Bible Study - Week 8	

Introduction to the Study Guide

Welcome!

If this is your first study with us, welcome! If you've been with us a for a while, welcome back! This term we're going back (way back!) into the Old Testament, to explore how people prayed before Jesus came down to earth to live and die to reconcile God and his people forever.

As we explore these prayers together, let's reflect on our own prayer lives. Let's compare the way we tend to pray today with the way the Old Testament believers prayed. Let's notice how the way they prayed is similar to the way we pray. Let's notice how it is different and why. Let's also notice where our prayer lives are lacking, and with God's help learn to pray more like God would have us pray.



Reading the Old Testament

When we start reading the Old Testament, there are a few things we need to understand. Perhaps the thing to establish first is that the Old Testament is all about Jesus!

Flow of the story

The Old Testament starts with God creating the world, and ends with God's people living in a poor shadow of their former glory, but waiting for God to fulfil his promise to send a saviour. The New Testament picks up from here, not as a Plan B, but as a continuation of the same salvation plan.

Over the page, you'll see a brief summary of the major events of the Old Testament. This 'bird's-eye-view' will help us to locate the different prayers we'll study in the historical and theological context of what Israel is experiencing at the time.



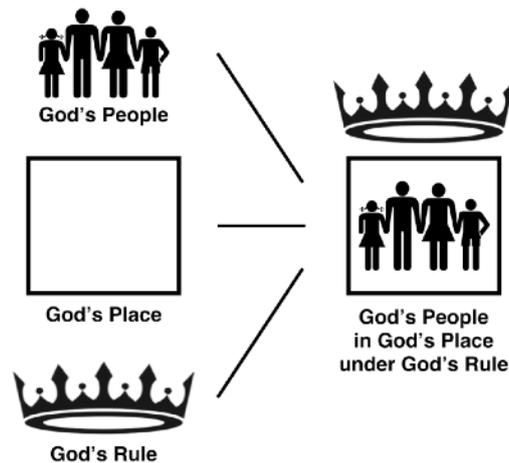
Major Events of the Old Testament

- ➔ Creation (Genesis 1 & 2)
- ➔ The Fall of humanity (Genesis 3)
- ➔ The Flood (Genesis 6-10)
- ➔ The call of Abraham (Genesis 12)
- ➔ The Exodus (Exodus 12)
- ➔ The giving of God's Law to his people (Exodus 20)
- ➔ Entry into the Promised Land (Joshua 3)
- ➔ The establishment of the Israelite monarchy (1 Samuel 10)
 - ▶ (David crowned king - 2 Samuel 5)
- ➔ God's covenant with David (2 Samuel 7)
- ➔ The building of the Temple (1 Kings 6)
- ➔ The Kingdom splits into Israel and Judah (1 Kings 12)
 - ▶ (The ministry of the prophets, e.g. Isaiah, Micah, Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah)
- ➔ Israel conquered by Assyria c. 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17)
- ➔ Judah conquered by Babylon, exile c. 597-586 B.C. (2 Kings 24-25)
 - ▶ (the ministry of the prophets, e.g. Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel)
- ➔ Return from exile c. 538 B.C. (Ezra 1)
 - ▶ (the ministry of the prophets, e.g. Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

The Pattern Of The Story

Whenever we read the Old Testament, it's helpful to understand the ideas that are being worked out in the history of God's dealings with humanity and particularly with his chosen people, the nation of Israel.

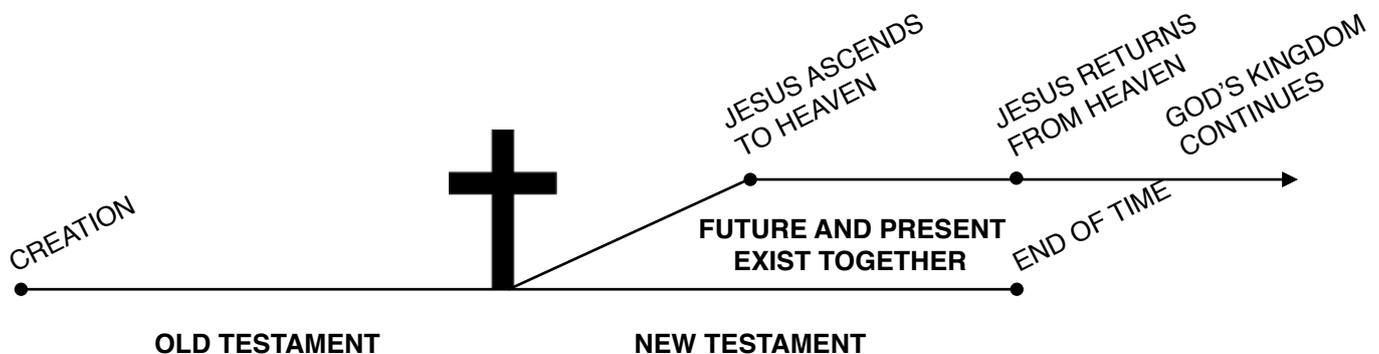
A useful way to think of each major section of the Old Testament is as working out the pattern of 'God's people, in God's place, under God's rule' (this will be familiar to anyone who has read Graeme Goldsworthy's book *Gospel and Kingdom*):



Whether we're reading about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Israel in the Promised Land, or even the vision of heaven in Revelation 21 and 22, this pattern lies behind each part of the Bible. In many ways, this is the goal of the salvation story and is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus (for more on this, read p.120-121 'Christ the Kingdom', in *Gospel and Kingdom*, by Graeme Goldsworthy © 1981, 2000, Paternoster Press)

It's Place in God's Salvation History

We should also bear in mind where the Old Testament fits in the history God's whole salvation plan. This will help us to understand the differences between the ways people relate to God either side of the cross.



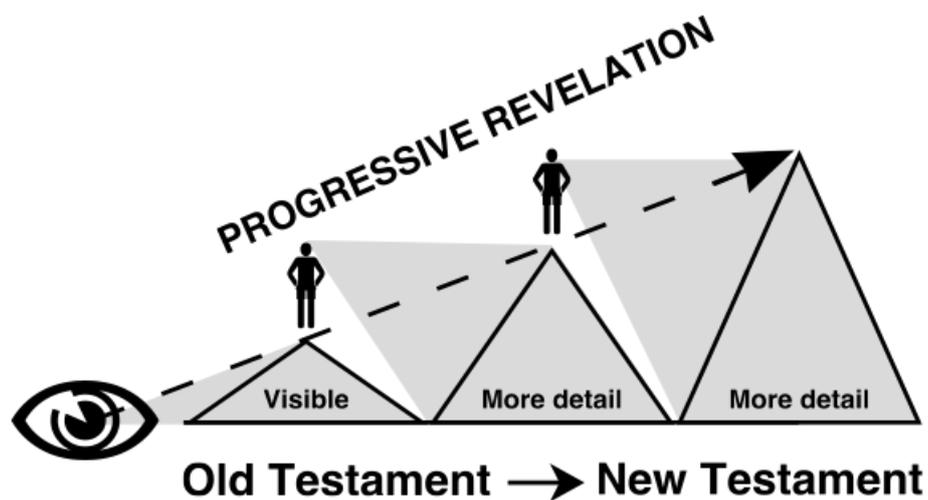
This means that we have to read the Old Testament differently to how we read the New Testament. God remains the same, his plans remain the same, but where the Old

Testament looks for future fulfilment of God's promises, the New Testament is founded on those promises being fulfilled in Jesus.

The New Testament is also concerned more with how the present fulfilment of those promises in Jesus have secured the future for God's people. This means that from the New Testament onwards, we live in a time where future promises are true in the present, but not yet realised as fully as they will be when Jesus returns. Some have called this the 'now but not yet.' This tension isn't as clear in the Old Testament, before Jesus.

Progressive Revelation

Finally, we need to mention something about what's called 'progressive revelation'. This just means that the Old Testament believers didn't have the whole Bible yet, and what they knew about God and his plans and purposes was limited to how much he had revealed to them at that point in time.



As an example, in Genesis 3:15 (which we will look at in the first study), we have the bare bones of the gospel, the promise of one who will come to crush Satan, though he will be wounded in the process. This is all God's people know, and actually all they need to have faith in to be saved. As the Old Testament progresses, the identity and work of the "Serpent Crusher" becomes clearer and clearer, until John the Baptist (the last Old Testament prophet) actually points out Jesus himself as the one who was promised (John 1:29).

We must see how Old Testament promises are fulfilled by Jesus, but we must be careful to not read the Bible backwards, and assume that Old Testament believers knew details about God and his purposes and plans that were only made clear later.

After all, in the Old Testament, God revealed himself through his Law and through the prophets. In the New Testament he has revealed himself directly in Jesus (Heb 1:1-4).

How to use this study guide

Each weekly study in this guide is divided into two major sections:

Sunday Message

Sermon Notes

The first section of each study is based around the Sunday sermon. There is a section for you to write notes during the message. When you're listening to the message, it's really useful to have your Bible open (either in book form or on a phone or tablet), so you can follow along, as well as something to take notes on. This helps you to remember what you learn.

You might want to write down

- The major points of the message
- Things that interested you
- Important verses and other verse references

This will help you follow what is being taught, but it will also help you remember what you learnt when you look over your notes later.

The Big Idea

This block is where you can write the one Big Idea of the message. Every message should have one simple, clear '**Big Idea**' which you can take away.

Questions

It's normal to go away from a Bible message still having questions. This section is for you to write down those things, so that you can try to find out later, maybe by asking the pastor or your group leader, or discussing it with your group.



Group Bible Study

You can do these studies in your own, but to get the most out of them, you should try and attend a weekly group Bible study - a Grace Community Group. Not only is it a great place to learn more about the Bible by reading and talking about it with others, it's also a great place to build solid Christian relationships to encourage one another and care for one another on the road to heaven.

COMA Framework

The studies in this guide are designed using an easy framework called '**COMA**'. And don't worry, it's got nothing to do with rendering you unconscious! You can use this framework to study any part of the Bible, so it's worth getting to know. (For more info on COMA, see David Helm's book *One to One Bible Reading*).

The COMA framework looks like this:

Context: These questions help you understand where the text fits into the big picture. It's about asking, "What's been happening up to this point?"

Observation: These questions help you to orientate yourself in the text by looking at what it says. It's about asking, "What ideas come up in the text?" and "What surprises are there?"

Meaning: These questions help you try to uncover what the author means. It's about asking, "What does this section tell me about God, about Jesus, and about myself?"

Application: These questions help you to work out how to respond to the Bible's message. It's about asking, "How does this passage challenge or confirm my understanding?", "Is there something in my life that needs to change?", or "What does this passage teach me about being a follower of Jesus?"

Prayer Points

Finally, after each study, there is a section to write prayer points. This way you can remember to pray for each other during and after the group meeting, and also keep track of prayers answered.

Prayer and praying for each other is a very important part of Christians meeting together.





23 April 2017

1. Praying For The First Time

Genesis 3:14-15 and 4:1-26

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

(take these questions to your group and try to find some answers)

Group Bible Study - Week 1

Thought Question: What is prayer? Try and come up with a short sentence that you could use to explain prayer to someone who has never heard of prayer before.

 Read Genesis 3:14-15 and 4:1-26

Context

1. What has happened so far in the book of Genesis (chapters 1-3)?

God created the world; he created man and woman, and set them to work in the garden. Mankind sinned against God, and were cursed and cast out of the garden.

2. Read the promise in Genesis 3:15. How does this promise affect the way we read the rest of the Bible?

Here God promises the 'serpent-crusher', one of Adam and Eve's descendants, who would defeat Satan. From here on, we await eagerly the arrival of this 'serpent crusher', especially when we're told that Adam and Eve start having children.

Observation

3. What suggests that Abel may be the promised 'serpent crusher'? (v2-4)

Abel was the offspring of Eve (see Gen 3:15), and God had a special regard for Abel and his offering.

4. What did Cain do to Abel? Why? (v2-8)

Cain killed Abel because he was jealous of God's regard for Abel's offering.

5. What happened to Cain? (v10-16)

Cain was cursed by God and driven away from the presence of God. Cain's descendants establish cities and other human activities.

6. What does Eve say is significant about Seth's birth? (v25)

Seth is born as a kind of replacement for Abel, especially as she uses the word "offspring" (note: in the singular) from 3:15.

7. How is prayer described in v26?

As "calling on the name of the LORD."

What is interesting to note here is that God's personal name (YHWH, or LORD in upper case in English Bibles) is used. This reminds us that the book of Genesis was written after the Exodus, probably by Moses. What the writer is clear about, however, is that people didn't just begin to reach out to some unknown random god, but they began to call upon the God who had revealed himself to Adam and Eve, and who had made particular covenant promises to them and their descendants.

Meaning

8. Why have Adam and Eve's 'offspring' so far proved to be a disappointment to those waiting for the fulfilment of Genesis 3:15?

Abel was killed; Cain was exiled for his wickedness. Seth might have been a possibility, but there is nothing to say about him before moving on to his son Enosh. Also, both Seth and Enosh died (see 5:8, 11), without the Bible mentioning anything more about them (or any of the other descendants of Adam and Eve, until Noah).

9. With this disappointment in mind, what could we say is the likely reason that people “*began to call upon the name of the LORD*” (v26)?

They are probably calling on God to fulfil his covenant promises. Their prayers may have sounded like this: “God of our father Adam and our mother Eve, we are desperate to see your promises fulfilled. We are desperate to see the serpent crushed. Please send your promised “serpent crusher” without delay!”

10. Now that Jesus has fulfilled God’s promise of a “serpent crusher” (see 2 Corinthians 1:20, 1 John 3:8), should we pray any differently, at a basic level, to the Old Testament believers?

No. While Jesus has fulfilled God’s “Old Covenant” promises, God has established a New Covenant (see Jeremiah 1:31, Luke 22:20, Hebrews 9:15) with promises that await fulfilment (see Hebrews 4:1, 2 Peter 3:13, 1 John 2:25).

Therefore we are still to anchor our prayers in calling on God to fulfil his covenant promises, only this time, it’s the New Covenant promises in view.

Consider Jesus’ ‘model prayer’ in Matthew 6: “Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:9–10 ESV)

To summarise, our prayer lives should be motivated, first and foremost, by a deep and urgent desire for God to come through on his gospel promises through Jesus. In essence, this is exactly the same way prayer began in Genesis 4:26.

Application

11. How would it change the way we pray if our prayers were first and foremost motivated by a desire for God to come through on his gospel promises?

(open question)

12. What are some of God's specific gospel promises? How should these promises inform our prayers?

(open question)

Prayer Points:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for writing prayer points.

30 April 2017

2. Praying For A Change

Exodus 32:1-14

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

Group Bible Study - Week 2

Thought Question:

Can our prayers change things?

 Read Exodus 32:1-14.

Context

1. What has happened in the book of Exodus leading up to chapter 32?

Israel was in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. They had gathered at the mountain to receive God's Law, and Moses had gone up the mountain to meet with God.

2. What promises of God are Israel waiting to see fulfilled? (see Genesis 12:1-9)

They are waiting for the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham, that his descendants (i.e. Israel) would multiply and be blessed, be made a great nation and take possession of the land of Canaan — the Promised Land.

Observation

3. What did Israel do? (v1-6)

They made a golden calf to worship as God.

4. What does God wish to do to Israel as a result? (v10, see also Deuteronomy 9:14)

He wishes to utterly destroy them.

5. What does he offer to Moses? (v10)

He offers to make a new nation starting with Moses.

6. What condition does God attach to his desire to destroy Israel?? (v10)

That Moses must "let him alone".

7. What does Moses do as a result of Israel's sin? (v11)

Moses implores God - i.e. he prays to God and begs him not to destroy Israel.

8. On what basis does Moses beg God to change his mind? (v11-13)

On the basis of God's promises to their fathers, God's character and God's reputation.

9. How does God respond to Moses' petition? (v14)

He relents/repents (Hebrew literally 'to ease back, to exhale') from destroying Israel.

11. Did the condition God attached to his destruction of Israel in v10 (i.e. that Moses must leave him so that he may do it) give Moses equal control over the situation to what God had? What in the passage tells you this?

The simple answer is no. God's retains total control over the situation. We see this in how he allows Moses, in his divine sovereignty some measure of influence over Israel's fate (v10), and how Moses still has to appeal to God to act differently (v11). God, in a sense forces Moses into the role of mediator in v10, but when God relents in v14, he is no way forces to do so by Moses.

12. What did Moses' prayer actually change, in terms of the whole story of the Exodus and God's people moving into the Promised Land.?

Moses prayer changed things, but it did not change God's commitment to his promises. Moses was allowed, by prayer, to influence which 'great nation' God used to fulfil his covenant promises, but not whether or not God would fulfil them. In fact, Moses was offered a choice to either benefit himself, or to intercede for Israel, and his prayer told God which option he chose.

13. Read Mark 14:32-36. How does Jesus' prayer before going to the cross demonstrate an understanding of prayer's power to change things, if not to change God's mind?

Jesus prays knowing what God's plan is, and knowing that God is powerful to do whatever he wants. He prays that God's plan may be accomplished in another way, a less painful and traumatic way, if it were possible. However, Jesus is satisfied with God's answer, whatever it may be. As it turns out, the answer is, "No.", as this is the only way God's covenant promises of salvation for his people can be fulfilled.

Application

14. In James 5:16, we read: *“the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working”*. From what we have learned from the prayers of Moses and of Jesus, how can we take James’ words seriously for our own prayers?

(open question)

Note: it would be easy to get to this point and slip back into either a view that prayer is pointless because God is sovereign, or that prayer can change God’s mind or twist his arm, so that we can always get whatever we pray for.

We shouldn’t pray for any change to the revealed will of God and his declared covenant promises. However, God has invited us to participate in his work through the mechanism of prayer. God has promised to act, in wisdom, power and goodness, in response to the prayers of his people (see also 2 Chronicles 7:14).

Perhaps the question is not whether or not we should pray for Aunt Mabel’s bunions, or but rather how we should pray. If we know from what God has revealed that spiritual health — a relationship with God through Christ — is more important than physical health, we might pray for Aunt Mabel to grow closer to Jesus through her difficulty, and for God to be glorified in her restoration.

And if we’re not sure about our prayers, ask God anyway because he is a gracious Father (Matthew 7:11) and pray for wisdom to know how to ask rightly (James 1:5).

Prayer Points:

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7 May 2017

3. Praying For Promises

2 Samuel 7:18-29

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

Group Bible Study - Week 3

Thought Question:

Do you ever pray for God to do things he has already promised to do? Why/why not?

 Read 2 Samuel 7:18-29

Context

1. What events led to David praying this prayer? (see 2 Samuel 7:1-17)

The nation of Israel had been established, and David's throne had been established in Jerusalem. David felt the need to build a temple for God, but God rejected his plan. Instead, God gives him the covenant promises of v11-17, where he promises to build David a house and a lineage and to establish his rule over God's people, through David's son.

Observation

2. What posture does David adopt as he prays? (v18)

He sits. This is interesting because, in the Old and New Testament, it is usual for Jews to stand and pray (see Genesis 18:22, Mark 11:25). Sitting before the Lord is usually done in the context of sadness or remorse — it is a very humble posture (see Judges 20:26). Also, people would usually sit before a teacher or an elder to be taught (see Ezekiel 20:1).

3. Try and divide David's prayer into sections, with a heading for each section.

Heading	Section
Praising God for his faithfulness to his promises	v18-22
Praising God for his faithfulness to his people	v23-24
Praying that God would fulfil his promises to David himself	v25-29

4. What is the only request David makes in his prayer? (v25)

That God would confirm the word he had spoken concerning David and his house, and do as he had spoken. (see also 2 Samuel 7:11b-17)

5. What does David's prayer have in common with the other prayers we've studied so far (Genesis 4:26, Exodus 32:1-14)?

David also bases his prayer on God's revealed promises and plan. He recounts God's promises and prays in accordance with those promises. His major concern is for God to come through on his promises.

6. Is there anything else surprising about the way David prays?

(open question)

Meaning

7. Why does David say he “has found courage to pray this prayer” (v27)

David says he has found courage to pray this prayer because God has revealed his plans and purposes to David.

8. How is Jesus the answer to David’s prayer? (see Luke 1:30-33 and 67-70)

Jesus is the true ‘Son of David’, and the one who will reign over God’s people forever.

Application

9. How does David’s prayer teach us to have courage/confidence as we pray?

David’s prayer shows us that we can have courage to pray when we ask God to come through on the promises he has revealed to us in his Word. (see 1 John 5:14-15)

10. How will learning to pray with courage to ask for what God has promised change our hearts towards God, even if he chooses not to answer those prayers yet?

We will learn to desire what God desires, and be eager to see those desires realised. We will learn to depend on God.

11. Which promises of God give you courage and confidence to pray? List as many as you can, with the Bible verse references. Use this page in the coming days and weeks when you pray to bolster your courage and confidence when you pray.

Prayer Points:

14 May 2017

4. Praying For Deliverance

Jonah 2:1-10

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

Group Bible Study - Week 4

Thought Question:

Have you ever prayed for God to deliver from you from a really stressful or difficult situation? What happened?

 Read Jonah 2:1-10.

Context

1. Where and when did Jonah's ministry take place? See 2 Kings 14:23-25.

Jonah was a prophet in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jereboam II, which was from approximately 782 BC to 753 BC. Jonah ministered less than 60 years before the Assyrians (whom he prophesied against) would destroy the Northern Kingdom.

2. How did Jonah end up "in the belly of the fish" (v1)?

Jonah disobeyed God's command to go to Nineveh and prophesy against them. Instead, he got on a ship bound for Tarshish. A great storm came up, and to calm the storm, Jonah was thrown into the sea. The LORD commanded a great fish to swallow Jonah. (see 1:1-17)

Observation

3. When did Jonah finally “call out to the LORD”? (v2)

When he had been cast into the sea, as he was sinking down.

4. What is the main point of Jonah’s prayer from inside the fish?

His main point appears to be to thank God for rescuing him.

5. Considering the background the story, what ironies do you notice in v3-4 and v8-9?

v3-4: Jonah doesn’t seem to take responsibility for what happened to him – “he wasn’t ‘driven away from your sight”, he ran!

v8-9: Jonah hasn’t been any more faithful to God than an idol worshipper. In fact, it was the idol worshippers themselves in v14 who called out to the LORD with more faith than Jonah had, and even made sacrifices and vows.

6. What does Jonah commit to do following his rescue (v9)?

He commits to recalibrate his life in devotion to the LORD., because he recognises that salvation only comes from him.

Meaning

7. What change in Jonah's attitude towards God does his prayer show?

There seems to be a realisation that to be apart from God can only result in destruction, but also that a person cannot really run from God. God hears Jonah's prayer from the "belly of Sheol" (v2), he owns the waves and the storm (v3), he brings Jonah up from the deep, from the roots of the mountains, from the pit (v5-6). (Compare Psalm 139:7)

8. How does Jonah's experience foreshadow Jesus? See Matthew 12:39-40.

Jonah being taken down to death but then being rescued and remaining in the fish for three days is a sign of what will happen to Jesus: he will be killed, and then remain in the tomb for three days before rising again. (See also Acts 2:22-28)

Application

9. What does Jonah's prayer teach us, positively and negatively, about calling out God for deliverance in a difficult situation?

(open question)

Prayer Points:

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21 May 2017

5. Praying For Healing

2 Kings 20:1-11

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

Group Bible Study - Week 5

Thought Question:

What has your experience been of praying for healing, either for you or someone else?

 Read 2 Kings 20:1-11

Context

1. What is happening in Judah and Jerusalem at the time of Hezekiah's illness (v6)? (see also 2 Kings 18:13)

Judah and Jerusalem were under siege by King of Assyria, Sennacherib. (Assyria had just conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel.)

Observation

2. What impressions do you get of Hezekiah from the way he responds to Isaiah's prophecies about his death (v2-3), and then his recovery (v8)? (see also 2 Chronicles 32:24-25)

Hezekiah feels sorry for himself, and shows much pride by giving God all the reasons why he doesn't deserve to die. Also, he shows faithlessness by asking for an additional sign of his healing — as if the healing itself wasn't a sign enough!

3. How does God respond to Hezekiah? (v4-6)

God declares through Isaiah that he has heard Hezekiah's prayer and seen his tears, and will add fifteen years to his life and deliver the city from the siege.

4. What is at the heart of God's decision to heal Hezekiah and deliver the city (v5-6)?

God decides to heal Hezekiah and deliver the city for his own glory and for the sake of his promises to King David, Hezekiah's direct ancestor — i.e., God is being faithful to his covenant promises.

5. What does the sign (v8-11) tell you about God's character?

He is the sovereign Creator who rules over the universe, and can even change the length of shadows at a command, altering the natural rules of his creation. Also, he is a patient and gracious Father who is willing to heal and reassure his people.

Meaning

6. How did this whole experience affect Hezekiah? Read Hezekiah's words in Isaiah 38:17-19.

Hezekiah was disciplined and shaped through his experience. He was humbled under God for his sin, moved to give glory to God, and compelled to be a witness to God's faithfulness.

7. How does this whole incident foreshadow Jesus, God's promised King and Son of David? Read Acts 2:29-32.

God's faithfulness to his King, the Son of David, is seen ultimately in how God raises Jesus from the dead, not letting him be destroyed. Hezekiah's illness and restoration after three days are a faint shadow of this.

Application

8. Is sickness and suffering always contrary to God's plan and will? Why/why not?

The answer here has to be 'no'. While illness and suffering are a result of the fallen creation (and ultimately the result of sin), nothing ever happens outside of the authority of God (Matthew 10:29-31). Because of this, he sometimes uses difficult circumstances on earth to shape and mould us (Hebrews 12:7-11).

We must remember, however, that God is always more concerned with his covenant promises and his glory (which will ensure our eternal, heavenly prosperity), than with our temporary, earthly comfort and prosperity (see Romans 8:28-30).

Consider also the example in John 9:1-3.

9. Hezekiah's prayer for healing, while very human, "fails to rise above self-pity". Based on what we have learned so far about prayer, how would you improve on Hezekiah's prayer?

(open question)

If your group struggles with this, you might get them to think along the lines of the previous prayers we have studied, which are appeals to God's character and covenant, rather than purely self-serving pleas.

Prayer Points:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for writing prayer points.

28 May 2017

6. Praying For Understanding

Jeremiah 32:16-44

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

Group Bible Study - Week 6

Thought Question:

Has there every been a time that you prayed for greater understanding of God's plans and purposes? What happened?

 Read Jeremiah 32:16-44.

Context

1. What was going on in Jerusalem when Jeremiah received a word from God?
(see 32:1-2)

The Babylonian army had laid siege to Jerusalem, around 588 BC.

2. What was the background to the 'deed of purchase' in v16? (see 32:6-7)

God commanded Jeremiah to buy a field belonging to another member of his family.

Observation

3. What is the main point of Jeremiah's long introduction to his prayer in v16-24?

Jeremiah praises God for his greatness and sovereignty, and acknowledges his power and his faithfulness shown throughout Israel's history, and his justice in bringing the Babylonians/Chaldeans to attack Jerusalem because of Judah's unfaithfulness.

4. What changes in v25?

Despite his acknowledgement of God's authority, sovereignty, power, justice and faithfulness to his purposes, Jeremiah doesn't understand why God would ask him to buy a field in a land that will shortly be conquered by an invading army.

5. How does God respond to Jeremiah's prayer, first in v26-35, and then in v36-44?

v26-35: God confirms that he will judge Judah's sin by allowing the total destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

v36-44: God foretells a time when he will graciously restore his people after this destruction.

Meaning

6. What seems to have been at the root of Jeremiah's lack of understanding? (notice the irony between v17 and v27)

Jeremiah seems to lack faith. He knows a lot about who God is and his history of dealing with his people, but he seems to lack faith to believe that God remains the same in this instance. He also may be trying to fit God into his own understanding, instead of submitting his human understanding to the limitless power and wisdom of God.

7. What was the point of Jeremiah buying the field? (see v14-15 and v43-44)

The field was meant to be a visible guarantee of God's faithfulness to his promises and his plan. It would like a kind of 'downpayment', securing the promised restoration of God's people.

8. Ultimately, the restoration of Israel to their land was a pale shadow of their former glory under kings like David and Solomon. What greater restoration is God promising in these verses that goes beyond a geo-political restoration?

These verses foreshadow God's eternal covenant in Jesus (Hebrews 13:20-21).

Application

9. How should we approach praying for understanding? Read Romans 11:33-36.

(open question)

We should always recognise that God's wisdom is infinitely greater than ours, and his plans and purposes are likely to be beyond our understanding because of who he is. This should drive us to humility and praise, especially where he has, in his grace, 'let us in' on his plans.

10. What should our response be when God withholds understanding from us?

We ought to trust what we do know of God — his faithfulness, his power, his justice, his goodness, his wisdom — and rest in the knowledge that God knows best and will do best.

However, Jesus does encourage persistence in prayer (see Luke 11:5-13). With that in mind, and with the reality of the Spirit of God within us to reveal God to us (1 Corinthians 2:11-13), being humbly, persistently prayerful for an understanding of God's purposes is probably a good place for the Christian heart to be.

Prayer Points:

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4 June 2017

7. Praying For Mercy

Daniel 9:1-24

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

Group Bible Study - Week 7

Thought Question:

What is the usual way you pray about your sin?

 Read Daniel 9:1-24.

Context

1. Where is Daniel, and why is he there? (see Daniel 1:1-7, 5:30 - 6:2)

Daniel was taken as a youth to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem. When Darius the Medo-Persian king conquered Babylon, Daniel was given a high position in government. Daniel 9 takes place in ± 538 BC.

Remember, Judah and Jerusalem were conquered and their people exiled under God's judgment because of their sin.

Observation

2. What did Daniel perceive about the exile in Babylon? (v1-2, see also Jeremiah 29:10-14)

Daniel perceived that the exile of God's people in Babylon was for a limited period of time, i.e. seventy years., according to what God had revealed to Jeremiah. This would be followed by a restoration of God's people.

3. List the things that Daniel's prayer recognises about God.

Daniel's prayer recognises God's greatness, his faithfulness to his covenant promises, his steadfast love (v4), his righteousness (v7), his mercy and forgiveness (v9), the clear revelation of what he requires from his people (v10), his just anger at sin (v16), the importance of his name being glorified (v15,19).

4. List the things that Daniel's prayer recognises about the people.

Daniel's prayer recognises Israel's sin and disobedience to God's commands (v5-6), how God has rightly shamed them for their sin (v7-8), their total sinfulness (v11), their failure to return to God and repent (v13), that they do not deserve God's mercy and forgiveness (v17-19)

5. How does God respond to Daniel's plea in v22-23?

God responds with love, and he responds eagerly (note how 'a word went out' at the beginning of Daniel's prayer — God didn't wait for the end of Daniel's prayer to weigh it up first and decide how he would act. God responded eagerly to the humble, penitent prayer of one of his people.

6. What answer does Daniel receive to his prayer for mercy and forgiveness? (v20-24)

An angel visits him to explain what will happen — at the end of the seventy years (symbolically called seventy 'sevens' or 'weeks', compare v2 with v24), Israel's sin would have been paid for, and they will be restored.

Meaning

7. What was the basis for Daniel's plea for mercy on God's people in exile? (v16-19)

Daniel appeals solely to God's mercy, his righteousness and his name. He admits and confirms that God's people have got absolutely nothing in them to deserve God's favour (v18).

8. How does Daniel's prayer, and especially v24, foreshadow what Jesus would come to do?

Jesus came to pay the price for the sin of God's people, and in a much greater way "to 'finish (lit. 'end') the transgression, put an end to sin, to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness" (see Hebrews 9:26b-28).

Application

9. What can we learn from Daniel's prayer about how we pray for forgiveness from God?

(Open question)

Here are some ideas: humble recognition of God's righteousness, justice, faithfulness, power and mercy; humble recognition of our own sin and unworthiness to receive forgiveness; total admission of our sin, holding nothing back (God knows it all anyway!); that God would be just and right to judge us for our sin; admission of wilful sin, despite what God has revealed about his expectations of his people; appeal for mercy based solely on God's glory, his mercy and his promises in Jesus.

Prayer Points:

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11 June 2017

8. Praying For Success

Nehemiah 1:1 - 2:8

Sermon Notes

What is the Big Idea?

What questions do I still have?

Group Bible Study - Week 8

Thought Question:

What kinds of things have you ever prayed for success with? How did it go?

 Read Nehemiah 1:1 - 2:8

Context

1. What had happened to Judah and Jerusalem (1:1-3)? (see also 2 Chronicles 2:15-23)

Judah had been conquered by the Babylonians, under King Nebuchadnezzar (± 587 BC). This was God's prophesied judgement on Judah for their sin. Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed, and the people of Judah had been taken into captivity in Babylon.

Eventually, Persia conquered Babylon (± 539 BC), and under King Cyrus, the people of Judah were allowed to begin returning to their land, under the leadership of Ezra (± 538 BC, see Ezra 1:1-4).

Observation

2. What news does Hanani bring Nehemiah about the remnant of Judah and Jerusalem (1:3)?

That the remnant "is in great trouble and shame", and that Jerusalem is a mess.

3. What was Nehemiah's response to this news (1:4)?

Nehemiah wept and mourned, and fasted and prayed,

4. Try and divide Nehemiah's prayer (1:5-11) into major sections, with a heading for each section:

Heading	Section
Praising God for who he is	v5
Asking God to hear his prayer	v6
Confessing sin	v6-7
Appealing to God's promises	v8-10
Asking for success	v11

5. Who is "this man", in v11? (*see also 2:1*)

This is Nehemiah's boss, King Artaxerxes of Persia, who would be the only one with the authority to do something about the situation in Jerusalem, which was now part of his kingdom.

6. Why does the king grant him success? (2:8)

Because "the good hand of God was upon" him.

Meaning

7. Why do you think Nehemiah responds to the news of Judah the way he does (1:4)?

With the scattering of God's people from the land, and the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem, it seemed that God's promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, of land, descendants and blessing) had failed. The temple, the symbol of God dwelling with his people, was destroyed; did this mean that God no longer dwelt with his people?

8. How does Nehemiah recognise that God has actually fulfilled his promises so far? (1:8).

Israel has been scattered because of their sin, in keeping with the promise God made to Moses.

9. What does Nehemiah ask for success with? (1:8-11)

Nehemiah is so moved by the state of God's people and God's kingdom, and wants to see something done about it so that God's promises in v9 may be fulfilled. He knows that, as cupbearer to the king, he may have access to the seat of power so that something might be done (see also 2:1-8)

10. How does Nehemiah combine prayer with faith and action?

Nehemiah has faith that God will fulfil his promises. Therefore he prays that God will come through on his promises, and then in faith he makes himself available for God to use in a practical way to fulfil those promises.

Note: the nature of Biblical faith is important here — faith is always trusting that God will fulfil what he has revealed, not wishing that God may do something that he has not revealed.

11. How does God grant Nehemiah 'success'? (v2:1-8)

The king notices Nehemiah's sadness and asks him what's wrong. Though fearful, and confident only by prayer (v5), he tells the king that he is said for his home city, Jerusalem. The king allows him to make a request, which the king miraculously grants, in addition to further requests. Ultimately, Nehemiah is allowed to return to Jerusalem to oversee the restoration of the city and of the temple.

12. Ultimately, how does God's promises in 1:9 point forward to Jesus? (see also John 9:49-53)

Jesus is the one who completely kept God's commandments, and by offering himself as a perfect sacrifice, he allows God's people to be restored to him such that they are gathered together from everywhere so that God may dwell among them.

Application

13. Considering what we have learnt from Nehemiah, what sorts of prayers for success could we expect God to answer positively?

We could expect God to answer positively those prayers for success in which we place ourselves in his hands to accomplish things that serve the fulfilment of his promises.

14. Apart from your prayers, how might your priorities change if you pursued 'success' the way that Nehemiah did?

(open question)

Prayer Points:

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