

This piece appeared in the May 2017 issue of [Premier Christianity magazine](#).

Lately I have found myself constantly talking and thinking about prayer. This is not because I am an expert on it, or even particularly good at it. Nor is it because it's the kind of thing I am paid to do. It's because I see ever more evidence of the need for it. These words of Jesus in Luke 11 offer us a good foundation for why we pray: "So I say to you: ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

Prayer begins by acknowledging that we don't have what we need, we aren't who we want to be and we don't see what we long to see.

Last year the Archbishop of York and I invited people up and down the country to pray for the ten days between Ascension Day and Pentecost. The prayers had just one focus – a request to God for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit so that those who don't know the love of Jesus might turn, hear his call and themselves becomes his followers.

We called the movement 'Thy Kingdom Come', and we were utterly astonished at how it took off. Many tens of thousands of people across denominations – Methodists, Catholics, Anglicans, Orthodox – came together and prayed, "Come, Holy Spirit." I can hardly remember anything that I've been involved in which I have sensed so clearly the work of the Spirit.

While I remain adamant that the Church doesn't need more initiatives, projects or resources, it was obvious that we should do this again. But the only reason is the sense that God is leading it and, when the wind of the Spirit is blowing, you just have to hoist the sails and go where you are taken.

Come Holy Spirit

Pentecost is, of course, the time when we remember the sending of the Holy Spirit. It is, perhaps, to our shame that the prayer "Come, Holy Spirit" has been judged to be a bit self-indulgent – gathering together to pray for a fresh infilling for our own sake.

Scripture teaches us something different. The gift of the Holy Spirit, God's empowering presence with us, isn't given to us for our own sake. The reason we pray "Come, Holy Spirit" is not so that we can feel good. It is so that we may be empowered to be his witnesses.

Every Christian is a witness. Whether we like it or not. Read these words of Jesus in Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

We cannot witness on our own. So for these ten days we ask, knock and seek for a fresh empowering of the breath of God for this calling.

Of course, we all know what it is to pray for things and not to know how our prayers will be answered. We all know that sense of disappointment and bewilderment when things we had desired haven't come to be. So how can we know praying "Come, Holy Spirit" will make any difference?

If we put it like that, isn't the question really: Will the Holy Spirit be given to us if we ask?

I can make a few guarantees because of some unchanging truths about the unchanging God we worship. God always, always listens to our prayers. He doesn't always give us everything we want. But if we sit in a room, or in a church, or in a cathedral, or in the middle of a field and pray "Come, Holy Spirit", we can do so with total confidence that the Spirit will come.

"Which of your fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:11-13)

There are no preconditions laid out on that promise. If we ask, the Spirit will be given.

The question then is this: Are we prepared to pray such a prayer? Are we prepared to have our lives turned upside down, rearranged and reshaped? Are we up for all God might call us to as his witnesses? Are we ready to see God at work in ways that we can't predict and can't control?

Evangelism

As well as praying, there is a second thing to do. We step out and do something. We put ourselves in God's hands to be used in answer to our prayer. It could be in your church, your home, or as an informal group of friends, but plan something which invites people to explore the good news of Jesus Christ and God's love for them. Do it with the intention of inviting those people to make a decision to follow Jesus.

Last year I met with a group of people who wouldn't call themselves Christians. We met a few times and read Bible stories together. We saw incredible movement in their lives and in their understanding of God, and it was beautiful. We weren't doing anything special – just opening up space for people to ask questions and encounter God.

So that is my encouragement and my urging. Get together and pray, and then make space for people who don't know Jesus to find out more.

This isn't just something else to add to the 'to-do' list. Many of us aren't in need of more things to do. Lots of us live life fairly overwhelmed, we're aware of our frailties and inadequacies, of our sinfulness and our failures; believe me, I truly know all those things.

But just think back to a time you've seen God's love and goodness bring transformation to someone's life. It is one of the greatest privileges to see the love of God in action, and it is worth stepping out for.

In Luke 11:5-8 Jesus says, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need."

Our cupboards might be bare when it comes to how we live and how we tell the gospel. In prayer we come before God and ask him to give us what we need to put before others.

If you get together with friends and pray "Come, Holy Spirit", and then invite people to come and explore who Jesus is, then for certain, by the end of your time together, some things will have taken place that will be what God is doing in those people's lives.

Seeing God move is the biggest encouragement you could ask for, and in my experience, when we get a taste for it, we want more. When we hear stories of people becoming Christians we think, 'Brilliant, this is what it's about. This is what we want.' And so we are encouraged to pray more, to expect more, to act more.

We are the Church of Jesus Christ, called together by him, made for his glory and empowered by his Spirit. We exist for God's sake and for the sake of others. And in Jesus' name and in his power we witness to the one who was dead and is alive again. Come, Holy Spirit, and renew the lives of your faithful people!

Thy Kingdom Come will run between Ascension Day and Pentecost 25th May-4th June. For more information, ideas for how to get your church involved and to download resources, visit thykingdomcome.global

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