



40 DAYS OF PRAYER



LENT 2019

INTRODUCTION

Early in 2019, we took the decision to embark on a season of prayer during Lent, as God seemed to be doing a “new thing” amongst us, and calling us to be “new wineskins”.

We wanted to use this time specifically to remind ourselves of the important scriptures and themes that God has been highlighting to us over a number of years; to reflect on the scriptures; to pray into the themes; and to respond in obedience.

This “call to prayer” also means we cry out to God for answers to some of the major challenges we currently face as a church, in terms of physical space, raising up leaders, and provision of resources.

Each of the weeks of Lent tackled a different theme relating to what we believe God is saying to us, and offered a challenge to us to pray and respond to him.

Week 1 - Pause - Ponder - Pray

Week 2 - The long view

Week 3 - Yielding and shaping

Week 4 - Equipped and engaged

Week 5 - By faith

Week 6 - Space - People - Resources - For Mission

Week 7 - New Wineskins

This booklet contains the “40 days of Prayer” emails that we each received and prayed through during Lent 2019.

WEEK 1 - Pause - Ponder - Pray

DAY ONE

Isaiah 43:16-17 *“This is what the LORD says—he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick”*

You might find it helpful to read through the early part of chapter 43 where God affirms his people saying, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.” In verses 16 and 17 God reminds them that he parted the Red sea and destroyed the Egyptian army so that they could escape slavery.

Reflect on:

The sacrifice that Jesus made to get you “out of slavery”

- The extent of the great power at God’s disposal to protect us
- The depth of the love that God has for each one of us

Pray:

- Thank God for his love and protection
- Thank God for his faithfulness
- Ask him to show you where he is moving in your life and the lives of those around you today

DAY TWO

Isaiah 43:18-19a *“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?”*

You might find it helpful to read through the early part of chapter 43 where God affirms his people saying, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.” He confirms that he has rescued them and will continue to protect them.

In today’s verses, God asks us to stop thinking about the past and to look out for the new thing that he is doing. God, as creator, is continually doing a new thing.

Reflect on:

- God’s nature as creator and his ability to renew, refresh and restore. To create and recreate
- Our tendency to live in the past and harbour regrets
- Our willingness to change and embrace new things

Pray:

- Ask God to refresh and renew any aspect of our lives which needs his touch
- Ask God to show us anything from our past that is holding us back and that we need to let go of
- Ask God to help us to be willing to change, to be flexible and teachable

DAY THREE

Isaiah 43:19b-21 *“I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honour me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.”*

In today’s reading God tells us that the new thing he is doing is “to make a way” for us through the difficulties we face, and to provide the life-giving resources we need, “streams in the wasteland” to make sure that we get to the destination that he has planned for us. He confirms that we are all very special! We are the chosen people that he has created specifically to be in relationship with him.

Reflect on:

- God’s faithfulness in getting us through tough times, remembering how he has helped us in the past
- God’s faithfulness in providing everything we need in every situation
- Knowing that God has good plans and purposes for each one of us
- Being his people, being chosen. That he cherishes the relationships he has with each one of us

Pray:

- Thank God for his faithfulness
- Thank him for his provision
- Thank him that we don’t need to fear our present circumstances, nor our future because he knows where we are going and how we are going to get there
- Ask him to encourage you today with some signs of his blessing, his provision, his plans for us that we would be sure that God is with us every step of the way no matter how bleak the “wilderness” looks

DAY FOUR

Isaiah 43:22-23a *“Yet you have not called on me, Jacob, you have not wearied yourselves for me, Israel. You have not brought me sheep for burnt offerings, nor honoured me with your sacrifices.”*

In today’s reading God tells us in no uncertain terms that we have not been praying as we should and that we have not shown our devotion in serving him. God is speaking to his people in Old Testament times using the names Jacob and Israel but if we call ourselves “his people” or simply disciples of Jesus, we have to include ourselves in this indictment as well. Calling on God means praying to him and using the expression “wearied yourselves” means praying diligently, frequently and faithfully. We don’t have to offer physical sacrifices of sheep or grain or oil, but we offer him ourselves as we are New Testament “living sacrifices”.

Reflect on:

- Our prayer lives
- Our devotion to him
- Our service to him

Pray:

- Ask the Holy Spirit to stir up our spirits to pray and spend time in God’s presence
- Ask God to show us the ways in which we have become “lukewarm” in our relationship with him
- Ask God to show us new ways to pray, to serve and to spend time with him and also new people to connect with who can help us

DAY FIVE

Isaiah 43:23b *“I have not burdened you with grain offerings nor wearied you with demands for incense.”*

In today's reading God gently reminds us that he hasn't insisted that we give him everything that he deserves. He knows our limitations so well and he hasn't pressed us to give more than we are capable of. He has been very loving in his restraint in dealing with our shortcomings.

Reflect on:

- God's patience with us
- His knowledge of us and our weaknesses
- His great love for us no matter what

Pray:

- Confess that we haven't loved God with our whole hearts
- Confess that we haven't served him with all of our strength
- Confess that we haven't obeyed him with all of our wills
- Receive God's forgiveness

DAY SIX

Isaiah 43:24 *“You have not bought any fragrant calamus for me or lavished on me the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses.”*

In today’s reading God again reminds us that we have not worshipped him in the way that we should. Fragrant Calamus is a sweet smelling flowering plant that grows in wetlands. Mentioned in Song of Songs 4:12 -14 as one of the fragrant plants in the garden, it was also used in medicine. The fat of the sacrifices was a “pleasing aroma” which Old Testament worshippers felt that God especially valued. So, God is saying to us that we have not made any special efforts in our worship to him to please him and to the contrary, we have made no efforts to avoid the habitual sins and offenses that we know we should avoid.

Reflect on:

- God’s goodness and forgiveness
- God is worthy of our best worship
- Our habitual sins
- What kind of worship would be a “fragrant offering” to God

Pray:

- Confess the habitual sins that we don’t seem to be able to break free from
- Confess our helplessness and dependence on God
- Spend time in worship (whatever works for you) each day during Lent
- Meditate on God’s beauty

Week 2 – The Long View

Make room – increase our capacity – enlarge our vision

DAY SEVEN

Isaiah 60:1-3 “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”

As a church, we have felt that God was speaking to us through Isaiah 60 for the last five years. Read through the whole of the chapter if you have time. Isaiah is speaking prophetically to the people of Israel once their Messiah has come and they are living in the Kingdom of God. As God’s children, we are already living in the Kingdom of God under the Lordship of Jesus Christ as our Saviour. Our light (Jesus) has already come. And somehow, although mysteriously, as God’s people, we reflect his glory.

Reflect on:

- God’s plan to bring salvation to the whole world in the person of his Son, Jesus
- Jesus instruction to his disciples (and therefore also to us) to be salt and light in our community (Matthew 5:13-16)
- The “darkness” that exists in the world and that is “over the peoples” around us

Pray:

- That God would give us the confidence and boldness, by the power of his spirit, to be “lights” shining in dark places in our community
- That we can work together as God’s family in Oakham and Rutland to be “Good News” to those we meet on a daily basis

- That God would guide us and lead us every day to people that we can be a blessing to

DAY EIGHT

Isaiah 60:4 “Lift up your eyes and look about you: **All assemble and come to you**; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the hip.”

We have had a strong sense for some time that God was blessing us, as a church, with new people coming to join us. In six years, our numbers have doubled which has created the challenge of how to fit everyone in on a Sunday morning and how to accommodate all the children’s groups.

Reflect on:

- The many ways that God has blessed us over the last six years
- The many gifts, skills and talents that the newcomers have brought to our church family
- The challenges of new people coming along to church week by week

Pray:

- That we would be able to physically fit all the new people (adults and children) in church on Sundays
- That we would make the effort to get to know new people and make them feel at home
- That we could discover the character and gifting of each individual, whether they are new or have been here for years, and train and equip them to serve in the church and the community

DAY NINE

Isaiah 60:11 “***Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that people may bring you the wealth of the nations—their kings led in triumphal procession. “***

God likens his Kingdom to a city with gates and walls. This city (God’s Kingdom) will have gates that are always open so that people can come and go freely. Everyone will be welcome to come in. There is also an indication of outsiders providing resources too.

Reflect on:

- Our willingness to welcome new people into our church family
- The welcome that we give to people who may not be like us, coming from different backgrounds and cultures
- Our ability and willingness to adapt the way we do things to make our gatherings authentic and relevant for the 21st century

Pray:

- God would make us an open and generous people
- God would give us compassion and understanding for everyone that walks through our doors
- That we would open our homes and show hospitality in our families as well as in church

DAY TEN

Isaiah 60:21b-22 *“They are the shoot I have planted, the work of my hands, for the display of my splendour. The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation. I am the Lord; in its time I will do this swiftly.”*

Rutland has grown enormously in the last thirty years, most people that we meet weren't born here. It is true to say of most of us that we are shoots that God has planted in this place. This gives us confidence that we were chosen to be living here at this time to fulfil God's plans and purposes. God takes the long view and we are part of a bigger picture. There is also a hint here that although we are a small county that God has plans to increase our size and significance.

Reflect on:

- God has good plans and purposes for each one of us
- God has chosen us to be living here at this time to fulfil a particular purpose in his plan
- The fact that nothing is impossible for God

Pray:

- For wisdom and understanding concerning God's plans for us as individuals, and as a church
- That we would be content in the place where we are planted
- That we would earnestly seek to hear from God concerning his plans for us

DAY ELEVEN

Isaiah 54:2 *“Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.”*

We switch now to another well-known passage in Isaiah where he is again speaking prophetically to his people about their future. This time he is speaking to the people when they return from exile. Picturing the people as a barren woman longing to have children, he tells them to make their homes bigger to accommodate all the children that God will bless them with. This speaks to us of the need to prepare for the blessing of an increase in numbers. In faith, we need to make room, lots of room, for the new people before they come.

Reflect on:

- God’s goodness and faithfulness to us
- God’s desire to share his plans with us in prophetic pictures
- God’s willingness to bless “barrenness”, “brokenness” and “emptiness” and “hunger”

Pray:

- For courage to have the faith to act ahead of seeing the physical evidence of God’s blessing
- For a larger vision for what God wants to do among us
- For an increase in our capacity to love and serve our community

DAY TWELVE

John 17:20-23 *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”*

During the Last Supper, Jesus prays for his disciples, but he also prays for “those who will believe through their message”. This of course, includes us, but remarkably, it includes all those who will believe through OUR message. We are all embraced by God’s all-encompassing love, the original disciples, ourselves, and the ones that come after us. It is therefore a large part of our job to “make room” for the ones that will believe through our message.

Reflect on:

- The fact that Jesus prayed specifically for us on the night before he died
- There will be believers who come to faith through our message
- That being in Christ we are somehow united with each other and with the Father

Pray:

- That we will be disciples that make disciples
- That we would learn to love one another and live in unity as a sign so that the world would know that we are Jesus’ disciples
- That we will “make room” for the ones that will believe through our message

Week 3 - Yielding and shaping

This week we're going to explore what it means to truly surrender every part of our lives to God, to yield to him and allow ourselves to be shaped by him.

DAY THIRTEEN

Jeremiah 18:1-4 *"This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." So, I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so, the potter formed it into another pot, **shaping it as seemed best to him.**"*

God sent Jeremiah down to the potter's house to show him in graphic terms how he was going to deal with his people. Jeremiah frequently had to deliver some very uncomfortable messages. God was going to "reshape" and "reform" the people as a potter would start again with a pot that was flawed. If we allow God to take complete control of our lives he may well choose, from time to time, to start again, to mould us and remake us and change us into something different shaping us "as seems best to him".

Reflect on:

- Our willingness to let God take charge of our lives
- Our willingness to allow him to shape our lives
- Acknowledging that God's plans are better than our plans

Pray:

- Confess that we're not always the best judge of what is good for us
- That we would be willing for him to change us
- Ask God to make us pliable and malleable in his hands

DAY FOURTEEN

Jeremiah 18:5-6 *“Then the word of the Lord came to me. He said, “Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?” declares the Lord. ‘Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel.’”*

Jeremiah was asked by God to deliver a very painful message to the people of the southern kingdom of Judah. Their disobedience has reached such a level that they were going to be taken into exile by a foreign power for a long period. We won't have to undergo any punishment like this at God's hands but, God asks us to allow him to make changes to our characters or our circumstances. As a potter has great skill in kneading and shaping the clay, so God knows just what to do to make us into the kind of “pot” that he wants us to be. And we must accept that his choice of style or shape or colour for us is the best one.

Reflect on:

- Times when our choices in our lives have not turned out for the best
- Situations that we might need to hand over into God's hands
- The way he tenderly and skilfully moulds us, and reshapes us

Pray:

- Thank God that he knows everything about us and that his plans for us will be the right ones
- That we will be willing to submit to God's plans for our life
- Your will be done in my life, God

DAY FIFTEEN

1 Peter 2:5 *“You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

Peter, here, writes to the believers about the process of being shaped by God, not just as individuals but as a body of God’s people – a church. We recognise that a church is made up of people and is not the building that it meets in. And each person in the church is like a “living stone” that is fitted together with others to make a meeting place for God to dwell in. This process of “being built” will involve us having the rough edges knocked off us and being shaped to fit in with the other stones.

Reflect on:

- Our calling as one of the living stones in a spiritual house
- God’s skill in building his church
- Our willingness to “fit in” with others

Pray:

- For Oakham Baptist Church
- For us to submit to God as “master builder”
- Patience as we undergoing the shaping process

DAY SIXTEEN

Hosea 10:12 *“Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and **break up your unploughed ground**; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.”*

Hosea was writing to the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel around the time that they were about to be conquered and carried off by the Assyrians. Hosea tries to assure the people of God’s love for them if they will only seek him and turn back to him. Hosea uses a farming picture here to show the people that there is work to be done and it’s time to take action. The unploughed “fallow” ground must be prepared before the seed can be sown. We know from our own gardens that there are weeds to be pulled up, hard ground to be broken up, and rocks and stones to dig up. Before we can sow good seeds of “righteousness” and reap a harvest of the evidence of God’s “unfailing love” there are things we need to remove from our lives. We may have to deal with bitterness or resentment. We may need to root out bad habits and wrong behaviour. Our hearts may be hard.

Reflect on:

- Parts of our lives that may be cluttered up with the wrong things
- Wrong attitudes and habits we may need to deal with
- The distractions that keep us from connecting with God

Pray:

- That God will show us what is “fallow” or “unploughed” land in our lives
- That we will be willing to let God “root out” the wrong things in our lives
- God will make us fruitful

DAY SEVENTEEN

Proverbs 3:6 “*In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*”

This is a very well-known scripture but there's some very powerful truth hidden in these few words. The bible talks a lot about God's "ways" or our "ways". And that simple word covers everything about our character, our nature, everything that we think, do and say – everything in fact. So, we must submit everything to God, and then he can "make our paths straight" - he can direct us and lead us in the way that is best for us. Easy to say - not so easy to do!

Reflect on:

- How far we insist on “doing things our way”
- How far we are willing to seek to discover his ways for us
- God's will for our lives

Pray:

- That we would “consider our ways” from time to time
- That we would acknowledge that God's ways are better than our ways
- That God would help us day by day to submit to him

DAY EIGHTEEN

John 13:34-35 *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

And we finish week three with one of the simplest things that Jesus ever said to his disciples and one of the hardest to put into practice. Jesus told his disciples that if they loved him, they would obey his commands. So, in practice, submitting to God, yielding to him and allowing him to shape us, means loving him with all of our hearts, serving him with all of our strength and obeying him with all of our wills. And the clear evidence of that will be that we love one another. And the world will know that we are Jesus disciples “if we love one another”.

Reflect on:

- Whether we can demonstrate our love for Jesus in our obedience to his commands
- How we fall short in loving God with our “whole hearts” the way the Father loves us
- How we can demonstrate our love for “one another”

Pray:

- Thank God for his patience with us
- Thank him that we only know what love is because he first loved us
- Ask him to help us with “one anothering”

Week 4 - Equipped and Engaged

As God builds his church, he also builds his people. As disciples we are being changed to be more like Jesus, and we are being equipped as individuals and as a church to carry out Jesus mission here in our community.

DAY NINETEEN

Ephesians 4:11-13 “So **Christ himself gave** the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, **to equip his people for works of service**, so that the **body of Christ may be built up** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

This equipping has many facets but Paul here is speaking about the ministry gifts that have been given to EVERYONE who belongs to a church. There's a common belief that these are leadership gifts but these are actually hard-wired into every believer so that they can work together to function as church.

Reflect on:

- God's ability and willingness to train us all to function as his church
- The gifts that we see in our church family
- Our willingness to be equipped and changed

Pray:

- For God to show us what our gifts are
- Ask him to show us where we are to use our gifts
- For opportunities to encourage others and recognise their gifts

DAY TWENTY

Isaiah 35: 3 *“Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, Be strong, do not fear; “*

We recognise that we are very human in our weakness, frailty and vulnerability. God means us to depend on him and find our strength in him. He does not despise our weakness as we often do. Isaiah spoke to God’s people to encourage them while they were waiting for God to come and save them as he promised. We also need God’s encouragement to keep going through tough times.

Reflect on:

- God’s comfort and encouragement
- God’s faithfulness to us
- Understanding our weakness

Pray:

- Ask God to help us to be patient with our own weakness
- Ask God to help us to be patient with others
- Thank him that he never gives up on us.

DAY TWENTY-ONE

Matthew 7:24-25 *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”*

We can make all sorts of excuses for doing things our way and not God’s way. But experience usually shows us that the “wise” thing to do is to follow God’s plans and build on the rock, the solid foundation which is Jesus’ teaching and example.

Reflect on:

- God’s wisdom
- The fact that storms will come
- That God’s ways are perfect

Pray:

- That we would be ready to listen to God
- That we would be willing to listen and obey God
- That we would be willing to admit that we make mistakes when we disregard God’s ways

DAY TWENTY- TWO

Genesis 26:22 *“He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarrelled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, “Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land.”*

Many Old Testament stories, like the one in Genesis 26 about Isaac, show us that God provided for his people with physical blessing so that they could flourish. In a similar way, God shows us that in order to grow and flourish spiritually, we need to depend on his provision and guidance. God gave Isaac the ability to find wells of “living water” which sustained them in times of drought. We have the “living water” of the Holy Spirit to refresh us and renew us so that we grow spiritually.

Reflect on:

- That we will go through “dry” times spiritually
- God intends to bless us.
- God’s miraculous provision for his people

Pray:

- That we will depend on God to guide us
- That we would expect him to bless us
- That we would be refreshed by spending time in God’s presence

DAY TWENTY -THREE

John 4: 13-14 *“Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’”*

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that he met at the well that he was the source of the “living water”, the source of eternal life and salvation. This same “living water” that we can find in Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, is life and salvation to us too. We cannot reach maturity as a church unless we are willing to grow spiritually by continually refreshing ourselves with “living water”.

Reflect on:

- Jesus as the source of life and salvation
- Refreshing of the Holy Spirit
- Our spiritual thirst

Pray:

- That we would turn to Jesus during dry seasons
- To be filled everyday with the “living water” of the Holy Spirit
- That we would grow and mature as a church family

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

John 7:37-38 *“On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them’.”*

Jesus was addressing the crowd at the Temple during the “harvest” festival of Tabernacles. The priests were pouring out water and asking for the blessing of rain for their harvest when Jesus told them that he was the living water that would flow from them, he was speaking of the gift of the Holy Spirit. As we are filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit will flow out of us to refresh and bless those around us.

Reflect on:

- The “living water” which is a source of spiritual life
- Jesus as the source of that life
- Our need to come to Jesus and drink

Pray:

- For a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit
- To be filled to overflowing
- For the rivers of living water flowing from us to bless and refresh those around us

Week 5 - By Faith

We are travelling through Lent in prayer, partly to go deeper in prayer; to go deeper in our relationship with God; but also because we have a very specific set of needs, as a church that we want to talk to God about. And it goes without saying that we need to pray in faith.

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

Joshua 1:9 *“Have I not commanded you? **Be strong and courageous.** Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for **the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.**”*

God speaks personally to Joshua at a time when he is in very great need of courage. Moses has just died and Joshua is tasked with taking on the task of leading his people into the Promised land. This was a huge challenge for Joshua who had been Moses’s assistant for most of his adult life. Now he had to become the leader and learn a whole new set of skills and face new situations that he had never dealt with before.

Reflect on:

- Our need for courage as God does a new thing amongst us
- God’s faithfulness in being “God with us”
- God’s willingness to encourage us as we step out in faith

Pray:

- For courage
- That we will not be fearful or discouraged
- Ask God to bless you with evidence of his nearness

DAY TWENTY-SIX

Matthew 5:13-16 *“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. **You are the light of the world.** A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ... ”*

Jesus gives these instructions to the crowds who are listening to the teaching we normally call “the Sermon on the Mount”. This is the first thing he says after the eight “blessed” statements or “beatitudes”. We readily acknowledge that the Sermon on the Mount constitutes some of the most challenging teaching Jesus ever gave to his disciples. But equally, it is our model for “Kingdom living” and cannot be dismissed as being impossible to achieve.

Reflect on:

- That Jesus himself tells us, as disciples, that we are salt and light
- The possibility that we are not living up to the name of “disciples” if we avoid trying to be salt and light
- That we are the light of the world because Jesus is the light of the world

Pray:

- Ask God to show you how to be salt and light to those around us
- That we would be a “salt and light” church
- That we would help and support each other in being salt and light

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

Psalm 127:1 “*Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.*”

These few words from Psalm 127 pack quite a punch. The house that the psalmist mentions could be a church, an organisation or a family. Jesus, the Lord, is building his church, his people, his Kingdom, his family and unless we let him be the architect and take charge, we are wasting our time. We proceed with any man-made plans at our peril as we run the risk of wasting time, effort and resources.

Reflect on:

- Our tendency to want to be in control
- God’s credentials as creator and designer of the whole universe
- Our interest in being a “Kingdom builder”

Pray:

- That we would involve God at every stage when we make plans
- For wisdom and patience
- For humility

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

Haggai 1:7-9 *“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honoured,’”* says the Lord. *‘You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?’* declares the Lord Almighty. *‘Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house’.*”

Haggai was speaking to the first waves of exiles returning from Babylon to instruct them to get on with rebuilding the temple. God has used scriptures in Haggai on several occasions in the last twenty years to speak to us about buildings. Haggai does not waste any words and in three words - “consider your ways” - he gives a stark warning that the people have only considered their own needs and neglected God’s temple. Haggai tells them that the timber is available on the mountain and that they should get on with building. For us, the “mountain” speaks of prayer, and the “timber” speaks of the resources we need, physical and spiritual. Therefore, we should pray for everything that we need for our building.

Reflect on:

- Our motivation concerning our plans for a new building
- Our willingness to pray for spiritual resources as well as physical
- The priority we give to prayer in church life
- That we are now the “temple”

Pray:

- Thank God that he has already made provision for our growing needs as a congregation
- For perseverance and persistence in prayer
- That God will give us the energy and enthusiasm we need

DAY TWENTY-NINE

Haggai 2:6-9 *“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, **and I will fill this house with glory,**’ says the Lord Almighty.”*

We have a sense in which the “new thing” that God speaks of in Isaiah 43 is happening to us now, in Oakham and Rutland. Although, for us, the “desired of all nations” – Jesus – has already come, there is an anticipation of his return for a glorious church. Isaiah 60 speaks of the glory that will be seen in us because “our light has come” and that idea is echoed here by Haggai (very typically using a lot fewer words).

Reflect on:

- The signs we see of God doing a “new thing”
- What this might mean for us as a church in Oakham and Rutland
- Our readiness to respond

Pray:

- For more understanding of the “signs of the times”
- That we will be able to say “Yes” to what God is doing amongst us
- that God’s glory might be seen in us in some way

DAY THIRTY

Haggai 2:8 *“The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the Lord Almighty. ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘And in this place, I will grant peace,’ declares the Lord Almighty.”*

Isaiah 60 speaks of the glory that will be seen in us because “our light has come” and that idea is echoed here by Haggai. Haggai tells us that all worldly goods are his to dispose of as he wishes. The “house” - meaning his church – that he is building in us will be far greater than the physical temple that it has replaced. And even more than that, God’s peace, his “shalom” his completion and wholeness will be in this place. Hallelujah!

Reflect on:

- God’s provision of financial resources
- The knowledge that we are now his temple
- That the present temple (us) is more glorious than Solomon’s wonderful temple.

Pray:

- Thank him for his peace that passes understanding
- That we will trust God for his provision
- Thank him for his goodness to us

Week 6 - Space - People - Resources - For Mission

The Theme for week 6 is asking God to equip us for our mission here in Oakham and Rutland.

DAY THIRTY-ONE

Luke 4:18a *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to **proclaim good news to the poor.**”*

Luke tells us that after Jesus’ baptism and temptation, he returned to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit”. The first thing he did was to preach in the synagogue in Nazareth and lay out his “manifesto” for Mission as he read from Isaiah 61, declaring “today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

As disciples of Jesus, this is our Mission too! We have been anointed and commissioned to proclaim good news to the poor. This doesn’t just happen when the gospel is preached in church but when the gospel is lived out on the streets, in offices, in homes, in schools etc. in Oakham and Rutland. We are called to BE good news.

Reflect on:

- Our anointing by God
- Our commissioning by God
- God’s call to mission in Oakham and Rutland

Pray:

- For facilities that are “fit for purpose” for reaching out to our community
- Ask God to give wisdom to the leadership team in allocating new roles and responsibilities to the current team
- Ask God to raise up new leaders to serve in Oakham Baptist Church

DAY THIRTY-TWO

Luke 4:18b *“He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind.”*

Jesus came to set people free from sickness, disabilities, mental illness and oppression. He opened physical blind eyes but also enabled people who were “spiritually” blind to see the light.

We are called to minister to those around us who are suffering in all sorts of ways. As we bring God’s light and truth into our everyday lives and activities, we can expect there to be a spiritual impact because of the people we are and the way we do things.

Reflect on:

- The needs we see every day amongst our friends and family, neighbours and colleagues
- Our concern for our community
- Our willingness to make ourselves available to God

Pray:

- For God to open our eyes to opportunities to serve our community
- Ask God to give us compassion for those we meet on a daily basis
- That we would be “light” to those around us who are spiritually blind

DAY THIRTY-THREE

Luke 4:18b-19 *“to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”*

The locals from Nazareth, would have recognised that the scripture from Isaiah referred to their coming Messiah. They saw themselves as “oppressed” by the Roman occupying power and very much wanted to be set free. The year of the Lord’s favour referred to Jubilee. The Levitical law stated that the Jews had to let the land lie fallow every 7th year and after 7 Sabbaths there was to be a Jubilee which meant that slaves were set free and land that had been sold returned to the original owners. The Jubilee had a special significance with reference to their promised Messiah. But as far as I can tell, although they maintained the Sabbaths for the land, the year of Jubilee was not celebrated in Jesus’ time.

Reflect on:

- The prevalence of oppression in our culture, e.g. refugees, human trafficking, inequality, homelessness locally and nationally
- The role of the church in championing justice
- Jubilee as a symbol of the freedom we have in God’s Kingdom

Pray:

- That God will show us what we can do to fight oppression
- That we, as a church stand up for righteousness in our community
- For people suffering spiritual oppression to be set free

DAY THIRTY-FOUR

Luke 19:10 *“For the Son of Man came to **seek and to save the lost.**”*

Jesus, referring to himself as the Son of Man (a name for the Messiah), told the crowd witnessing his conversation with Zacchaeus, that his Mission was to “the lost”.

Jesus’ critics had a problem with Jesus spending time with people they considered to be sinners like Zacchaeus, the tax collector. They felt that a religious leader should only spend their time with respectable people. Jesus pointed out that the sick needed a doctor, not the well and that the lost needed a Saviour not the righteous. It is ironic that the people who thought they were righteous, the religious leaders, were also in need of a Saviour.

We are asking God for improved facilities, excellent leadership and resources so that we can follow Jesus example in seeking to save the “lost”. As much as we will enjoy a new building so that we can better serve our congregation on Sunday mornings, our motivation for praying for improved facilities has to be principally to serve those who are not in church on Sunday mornings!

Reflect on:

- The reasons why we meet in church on Sundays
- The “lost” that we come across in our everyday lives
- How much time do we spend sharing our lives with non-Christians?

Pray:

- Ask God for the solution to our “space” problem
- Ask God to show us the ones in our community that we are to seek
- Ask God for the right tactics for reaching out to “people of peace” who are open to hearing about Jesus (Luke 10:5-7)

DAY THIRTY-FIVE

Mark 16:15-18 *“He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.’”**

**Not all early copies of Mark’s Gospel contain these verses.*

It is thought that these words of Jesus might have been added to Mark’s Gospel at a later date as they don’t appear in the earliest copies. Nevertheless, these words, which are similar to what appears at the end of Matthew’s Gospel, might well have been recorded as an oral tradition or in other documents which haven’t survived.

This is Mark’s version of the statement from Jesus that we call the Great Commission. Jesus quite clearly was sending out his disciples to preach the Gospel everywhere they went and to everyone they met. This was to be their prime purpose in life. These instructions are to people and not to institutions. And Jesus stated that there would be miraculous “signs” that would accompany their preaching.

Reflect on:

- Which parts of the “world” i.e. our community, God is sending us to
- How we preach a contemporary Gospel to Oakham and Rutland
- What “go” means for us as individuals ... what does it mean for you?

Pray:

- Ask God for boldness in speaking to friends, family, neighbours and colleagues about Jesus
- Ask God for wisdom, as a church, in planning strategies for reaching out to the community
- Ask God to give us the resources we need to serve our community

DAY THIRTY-SIX

Matthew 28:18-20 **18** *“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Jesus gave his disciples the authority to go out and do all the things he had been doing, using his name. And as Jesus disciples we have exactly the same authority. He asks us to be disciples who make disciples (not converts). And most importantly, he insists that he IS with us always. What wonderful promises!

Reflect on:

- The extent to which we are equipped spiritually to pursue Jesus’ mission
- The urgency of the task
- The priority Jesus places on discipleship

Pray:

- That God will equip up spiritually and in practical ways for the task
- That we will undertake the commission boldly and enthusiastically
- God let your Kingdom come in Oakham and Rutland, as it is in heaven

Week 7 – New Wineskins

Summing up

Let's look back on our prayer journey since February 3. We recognised that God is doing a new thing at Oakham Baptist Church (Isaiah 43:19) and we committed to pause, ponder and pray for 40 days during Lent.

The Lent themes have been:

- Pause, ponder, prayer
- Make room, increase our capacity, enlarge our vision
- Yielding and shaping
- Equipped and engaged
- By faith
- Space, people and resources for mission

And finally, for the last few days of Lent we are thinking about Jesus words to us from Mark 2 which we looked at on January 20.

Mark 2:21-22

“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.”

DAY THIRTY-SEVEN

Questions

- Did you take the time to pause, ponder and pray during these 40 days of prayer?
- Do you want to continue to go deeper in prayer and in your knowledge of God?

Challenge – Let God use you as a new wineskin:

- Make time for God, in prayer, in worship, in reading your bible.

DAY THIRTY-EIGHT

Questions

- Can you see the new thing that God is doing at Oakham Baptist church?
- Can you see the new thing that God is doing in you?

Challenge – Let God use you as a new wineskin:

- Respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in church and in your prayer life.

DAY THIRTY-NINE

Questions

- If we are being re-shaped as a church, and as individuals, for mission (as we believe we are), how is that being worked out in your life?
- What should we be doing differently as a church?

Challenge – Let God use you as a new wineskin:

- Allow yourself to be filled with the new wine of the Holy Spirit, refreshing, restoring and renewing you.

DAY FORTY

Questions

- If God is talking to us about mission (and we believe he is), is he talking to you about getting more involved in the OUTward activities we do as a church or as an individual?
- What else could we be doing as a church in the community?

Challenge – Let God use you as a new wineskin:

- Get involved in one or more of the OUTward, missional activities of the church, if you are not already involved and if you are physically able to do that in your circumstances, to serve in the community, to show Jesus love and compassion, to speak about Jesus and to be a blessing to those around us.



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