

- Mission Series #2

## Introduction

- **STORY**
  - OSPRAC computer bug - one character made all the difference!
  - Little can have an effect vastly disproportionate to their apparent significance.
  - Prayer the single most important practical step we can take to reach out to those around us, near and far.

## Assumptions

- This is the second sermon in a series of seven on what Mission is all about
- I am assuming in all that follows, both this evening and during successive sermons, that you have "bought into" the vision I tried to paint then:
  - essentially, that mission is critically important;
  - that we are motivated to be involved;
  - that we are all called and equipped to take our place in the task;
  - and that we are here in part because we are involved in the process of discovering HOW we might reach out, as individuals, as a congregation here in Dundee/Fintry in particular, and as part of the wider church in this land and world.
- I'm assuming that you are with me on all of that, so our focus is firmly on HOW:
  - hopefully practical, encouraging, real, and relevant.

## WHY should we pray?

- Often don't pray - find ourselves bemoaning the fact that we don't pray more, giving ourselves a hard time that we don't pray more.
- I don't quite know why that is:
  - maybe a general suspicion in our culture of anything that smacks of being superstitious, and unconsciously our view of prayer is coloured?
  - maybe because we haven't seen prayer "working"?
  - maybe because our lives aren't reflecting a relationship with God, and that is obstructing communication - God saying "sort that one area of sin out", and in prayer we sub-consciously know we'll be confronted with that again, and it makes us uncomfortable?
- Perhaps, worst of all, we are content with the status quo - we are scared of the prospect of those around us changing, asking hard questions about faith, maybe of us having to speak of Jesus!
- And so we don't pray.
- Not suggesting we are always conscious of these reasons - rather that they may lie behind whatever excuses we actually use for not praying.

## Pray... Because of Jesus' Example

- He prayed, for his work, for others, even though he was God himself.
  - "not my will, but yours";
  - Luke 5:16 "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."
  - etc, etc!
- Should we not also?

## Pray... Because we are God's Fellow Workers

- God doesn't treat us as slaves, or automatons...
  - ...but as friends, as colleagues, as co-workers.
  - 1 Corinthians 3:9 "For we are God's fellow workers"
  - 1 Thessalonians 3:2 "We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith"
- Therefore he doesn't either:
  - take all the work onto himself, and leave us with nothing;
  - nor leave all responsibility with us (which we couldn't do anyway!).

- Co-workers; partners.  
**John 15:15:**
- "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."
- Therefore, we are part of the process whereby God brings people to himself.
- *Jam 5:16 "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."*

### Pray... Because we are Weak

- We can't do things ourselves.
- Jesus' words to the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest (Matt 26:41):
  - "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."
- Bill Hybel's story of preaching in India:
  - maybe 20-30 thousand people there, he worried about translation, about destroying the work and witness of the people who had invited him to come, about getting the humour all wrong, about insulting people - and he is a GREAT preacher!
  - He had allowed his focus to shift off God and onto himself, and talented though he is, he couldn't stand up there to preach.
- God can do much more as we pray than as we go!
  - not that we will then not go, because as we will see, prayer tends to change us as well!

## WHAT should we pray?

### For God's Glory

- Look at the disciple's prayer:
  - their starting point and prime concern was God's glory and the honour of his name.
  - they were conscious of his creative power, over heaven, earth and sea;
  - they were conscious of his kingly sovereignty: why do the nations plot in vain, when it is God Almighty they are up against?
  - they were conscious of his over-ruling of even blackest circumstance, when he brought glory out of Jesus' death.
- The end result of what they prayed for was to be the glory of God's name.
- They weren't praying for boldness or for healings and miracles to boost their own egos, or draw attention to themselves, but to bring glory to God's name.
- As we pray, we will do the same - praying that God would glorify himself, AND praying for specific things that will bring glory to his name!
  - (this will require us to learn, as Romans 12:2 says, to "not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.")

### For ourselves

- All that immense prayer was focused on one thing, prayer for boldness!
- Not for skill; not for the honour of seeing someone come to faith through us; ...
- **Boldness!!**
- Courage; forthrightness.
- Opportunities are there for the taking, except that we lack courage.
- We don't like to impose; we don't want to embarrass ourselves...
- So pray for boldness - God will give it!

## For others

- Not merely that God would "bless" them!
- In fact, often, that God would make them uncomfortable!
- Conscious of sin; conscious of need; unsettled with what they are currently content; open to the deeper issues of life...
- Pray with boldness too - that they will come to faith in Jesus Christ; that they will be caused to confront the sin that is keeping them from Christ.
- Danger here of giving a triumphalistic impression - folk aren't flocking to faith because we aren't praying; pray and it will happen!  
- or worse, that your son/daughter/husband/wife/friend/parents/... haven't come to faith because you aren't praying.
- God is sovereign: but he does stoop to hear our prayers.

## For WHOM should we pray?

- Can go to two extremes - must work at keeping them together!
- **Everyone!**
- Non-specific; diffuse; hard for us to sustain vision without concrete situations that we know about.
- **Just one or two!**
- Only ever pray for particular people - either very close people, or two available non-Christian friends.
- Shrink vision - God can only work in the lives of those one or two people?
- Need to find balance between the two!
- No "right" answer, for everyone's situation is different, the people they are in contact with is different, their relationships with those people are different.
- Specific, that we demonstrate real love and concern in practical, nitty gritty, real-life prayer - not a prayer divorced from the tensions of daily life.
- But also wide ranging, that we never become selfish (praying for those we love or know) or limit God in what he can do.
- Remember: praying for PEOPLE - not converts, potential Christians.

## HOW can we pray?

- Alone;
- In small groups - eg triplets
- In larger groups
- As a congregation
- As a regular thing - weekly PM, or regular meeting with small group.
- As a special thing - half nights of prayer, PMs for special occasions...

## Prayer changes things!

- Story of SU camp, prayers praying and only seeing results decades later!
- Of me coming to faith as my parents prayed for me
- Revivals very often start in prayer.  
- (not a mandate to manipulate God - we want revival, so pray - but to be doing what we should be doing anyway!)
- Let us pray!