

KEEPING CONNECTED 9

17th May 2020



**PRAYER IS AN
IMPORTANT PART OF
THE CHRISTIAN LIFE
AND IS AS BEAUTIFUL
INCENSE BEFORE THE
LORD. LET'S USE
THESE STRANGE DAYS
TO ENHANCE OUR
PRAYER LIVES.**

READINGS:

REVELATION CH8 V1-5

THE SEVENTH SEAL

EXODUS CH30 V34-38

INCENSE



PRAYERS

Lord, we bow our hearts before you and give you honour and praise. Oh God, strengthen our prayer lives. Help us to pray more. Nudge us to pray when we are doing mindless tasks. Help us to truly know who we are in Christ, to understand that you always hear us, to know your Word so that we may pray it, to be mindful of our own prayer needs and the needs of others, and to know that you really do know us. Forgive us our sins and empower us we ask in Jesus' name...

Take a moment to pray for NHS staff, key workers, those affected by coronavirus, vulnerable children, the elderly or lonely, our Prime Minister and government officials, our families and friends, the world and church near and far- lift to God the people and places that lie heavy upon your heart

'May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.'

Psalm 141 v2

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY

Helping hands to pray! Prayer is important but most Christians struggle with it. Sometimes it's hard to know what to say and then it becomes a big scary thing. **Think about it:** Prayer helps us to grow, allowing our faith to develop. When we pray we can share with God our hopes and fears and ask him to help us and others to understand more of who he is and what he wants for our lives. Prayer is not a way of getting everything we want in life, because we often don't know what is best for us, when God answers prayer in a different way than we had hoped, or seems not to answer, it is because he has a different plan than we do. Prayer helps us to understand God's plan for our lives and is a means to help us when things are sad or tough. Prayer is just a chat with God and is nothing to worry about! **Do it:** Put your hands together in a prayer pose,

using your digits to help you pray. Your **thumbs** are closest to your heart, so pray for those you love- the **fingers you point with** are next, so pray for those who 'point out' the way to live and look after us, like the government, police officers, doctors and nurses, soldiers etc. – the **longest fingers**, the ones that point the highest, as if to God, pray for the church and for Christians near and far, especially those who live in countries where people don't like Jesus- the next fingers, which are usually the **weakest fingers** on our hands, pray for those who are ill or suffering, pray for those affected by the big news stories and also people you know down the road who are having problems- Finally, the **little fingers**, pray for little old you! Anything you want to talk to God about or ask him, just say whatever is in your heart and he will listen. **With helping hands prayer is not that scary, use them and pray often!**
Pray: 'Father thank you for the wonderful gift of prayer, forgive us when we don't use it, help us to grow in our understanding of who you and your will for our lives- Amen'



DEVOTIONAL

The Aroma of a Beautiful Recipe

It would seem as if lockdown has turned everyone into great chefs and bakers. While I personally await my own transformation it has been wonderful to hear of the vast array of sweet stuff and new combinations of food being tweaked and tasted. Perhaps the old recipe books have re-emerged, their gravy stained pages once again seeing the light of day, taking part in a culinary adventure that a few months ago seemed ridiculous to suggest. I am often told that the best recipes are those old tested ones, passed down from granny that have an enduring quality. These recipes don't just lead to full bellies but they deliver a sense of home and satisfaction, a feeling of comfort and belonging in an often lonely world.

In Exodus we are privy to the building of the Tabernacle, a huge tent that was to be erected in the centre of the Israelite camp, whenever and wherever they stopped during their long journey through the wilderness. The whole structure was in essence a visual sermon, pointing to the nature of God, his promises and plans for his people. Each piece of furniture highlighted a different aspect of his character, leading to the most wonderful of all, the Ark of the Covenant, located at the very back, behind the veil in the Most Holy Place. The Ark expressing the core of God's promise to the Israelites, that he was their God, that they were his people and he was with them, in the very midst of their lives. In front of the veil sat the Altar of Incense upon which beautiful fragrant incense burned, this incense made in line with God's given recipe, of precious ingredients, would have filled the Tabernacle with a pleasing aroma, the symbolism of this being multi-layered. The smell masked the somewhat foul odour of the sacrifices that took place day and daily at the Bronze Altar just outside the tent, therefore representing the Israelites longing for their sins to be 'covered' and not seen by God. The incense also acted as a representation of the Israelite desire to honour God, by doing that which was right in his sight, their behaviour being like that of a pleasing aroma to their Heavenly Lord. Another aspect that is symbolised by the incense that is important to note is the coming together and the receiving by God of his peoples' prayers. If we fast-forward all the way to Revelation we see the prayers of the people of God going up before the Lord alongside the smoke of incense offered by an angel. There displayed for us is a great and wondrous unity, our prayers received alongside all believers, past, present and yet to be.

Prayer is so important in our walk with Jesus because it connects us in a deeper way with God and with one another, for as we pray individually we are not alone, our prayers like a cloud of fragrant incense are gathered together; as our prayers are, we are also, held together even though we may be apart. How are you managing with your prayer life just now? Do you find prayer an awkward, false or overly pious exercise? Perhaps it's time to try a simpler and more 'down to earth' approach? To try a new recipe and practice, improving a little with each effort. If you have never really had a pattern of prayer in your life, or want to refresh, why not use the 'helping hands' approach that I shared with the children? After all in the end it is the simple childlike faith that Jesus points to as a way we are to trust in God, there is nothing wrong with simple heartfelt prayer, in fact there is little else as lovely. Why not commit to praying at the same time each day? Leave a little space of silence, just like the scene in our reading from Revelation, use the simple yet wonderful 'helping hands' method and just talk to your Father in heaven, maybe even jot down a few points to remind yourself of things to remember to pray about next time. It doesn't have to be fancy, theologically impressive or complicated, it just has to be real, no matter how odd it may seem it will with habit be like a little acorn from which a mighty oak will grow. Pray, and do so often, for it is a pleasing aroma to the Lord whom you will come to know better as a result.

***O God of Bethel, by whose hand
Your children still are fed;
who through this earthly pilgrimage
Your people safely led:***

***Our vows, our prayers, we now present
before Your gracious throne; as
You have been their faithful God,
so always be our own!***

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CREGAGH KEEPING CONNECTED

Each Friday morning I will email out an update like this one, which will include a devotional, children's activity, prayer points and readings. These can be hand delivered or posted if necessary, if you hear of anyone who is not receiving a copy, or if you know of someone outside of our congregation who might benefit from receiving one please let us know.

PRAYER

The fortnightly Prayer Link will be sent out this incoming week, if you have any prayer requests please pass them on, if you do not receive the Prayer Link but would like to via email or printed copy please let me know.

BIBLE STUDY

If you would be interested in joining our Zoom Bible study group please email me. We meet on Mon evenings at 7pm, however another time can be arranged, or another group formed if required. It would be great if more folk were interested in joining in. I would encourage you to take part or contact me about setting up another group at an alternative time.

THANK YOU!

We want to say a big thank you to children and young people for contributing beautiful pictures (two of which are attached today) - if there are any more please send them in, the more the merrier!

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY

If you have taken any photos of your children enjoying the 'Keeping Connected' children's activities and would be happy for folk in our church family to see them, please send them on to me.

PCI MATERIAL

PCI are gathering useful material to help during these challenging days, for a number of blogs, podcasts and links to other materials visit- www.presbyterianireland.org/thesehreeremain

You may also wish to take this opportunity to follow PCI on social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) to keep up to date with resources and news.

GET IN TOUCH

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if I can be of any help whatsoever, if you need messages or even if you would just like a chat.

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