

24 Hours of Prayer: Journeying from Wilderness to 'What's next?'

Praying for our world, the church and ourselves beyond lockdown

8am Saturday 27th March - 9am Sunday 28th March

Welcome to our 24 hours of prayer; when we unite in the presence of God and each other and seek God's will for the journey ahead; when we praise and worship God and give thanks for all He provides; when we admit our own limitations and mistakes in the knowledge Jesus died for all our sins; when we lift the situations on our hearts before God and most importantly when we take time to listen for God's response.

We are using, as a framework for the 24 hours, the sections from Worship in the Wilderness which has been a valuable focus through Lent this year as we continue to be in the wilderness of Covid. What has been clear is God has been present. Let us open our hearts and minds to what doors he has been opening, what doors he has been closing and what challenges God needs us to face and overcome.

The programme for the day is on the Stanhope Methodists website. We hope you are able to 'dip' into as much or as little as you wish.

For those who prefer to have some material to assist their journey, the following can be used. This is written to assist, not dictate, your path. Sometimes on a journey, we come to a cross roads and do not know which path to take. Seek wisdom in God's Word.

Spirit Led Journey

When you consider the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which part of the Trinity can you speak most confidently about? For many, the answer is God, the Father or Jesus, the Son; the Holy Spirit can be harder to articulate, but the Spirit is who Jesus sends to be our Advocate and Guide, our Comforter and Wisdom. There are many Bible verses and you may want to explore and remind yourself of some. We have just listed a few:

But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative - that is, the Holy Spirit - he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. John 14:26 (NLT)

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. John 16:13 (NLT)

And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God. 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 (NLT)

Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir. Galatians 4:5-7 (NIV)

Let us consider prayerfully how much we allow God or His Spirit to guide our journey.

Take time to consider 3 things that are important at present for you to pray through for:

1. your Church
2. your community or nation or world situation
3. yourself

Take time to reflect on those things and ask the Spirit to guide you.

We share some images that may help you reflect on the Spirit and all that the Spirit provides:



Simple Journey

The rich simplicity of being yourself before God 1 Timothy 6:6 (The Message)

Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. Matthew 6:19-21 (NLT)

Then I observed that most people are motivated to success because they envy their neighbours. But this, too, is meaningless - like chasing the wind. "Fools fold their idle hands, leading them to

ruin. And yet, better to have one handful with quietness than two handfuls with hard work and chasing the wind.” Ecclesiastes 4:4-6 (NLT)

But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:31 (NLT)

Be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes. Psalm 37:7 (NLT)

A time to be silent and a time to speak Ecclesiastes 3:7b (NIV)

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Luke 5:16 (NIV)

In this last year many of us have had to forego many of the things we take for granted, and yet our lives can be full of busyness and of noise. We struggle to be still. Just recently, I had to meet with someone and they talked non-stop for over an hour. How do we deal with silence? How does God get a chance to speak and for us to hear?

Find a way to be still, to really stop all the distractions and to 'be'. Listen for God's response to your presence.

Go into an outdoor space and sit quietly; hear all the noises around you; acknowledge each one but then focus on a Bible verse or short passage and centre yourself on those words; rest in them.

We live in a world where to live simply is difficult, if not impossible. We are surrounded by distractions, noise, voices that would seduce us into thinking that we need to have more to be successful. We struggle to be still and we are uncomfortable with silence.

We read in 1 Kings 19:1-13, God's presence was revealed not in the earthquake, wind nor fire but in the quiet whisper.

How are we then able to hear God's voice in the clamour of the world?

Spend some time reflecting on what are the things that distract you from hearing God's voice. Then ask the question - what can I do to reduce the amount of those distractions which encroach on time with God?

Practical Steps

Take a look around your home. How much "clutter" have you accumulated that gets in the way?

Reflect on Matthew 6:19-21

Count up the hours you spend watching TV. Consider turning it off for a short while and spend the time in quietness with God.

Reflect on Isaiah 40:31

Jesus often withdrew to quiet places to be with His Father so how much more do we need to?

A story I came across recently impacted me and I share it with you:

It was harvest time and the farmer was working really hard getting the hay bales into his barn ready for the winter. At the end of the day, he suddenly realised he had lost his wristwatch and, because he treasured it, he began to search frantically for it, without success. At suppertime, his son, realising his father's distress, said he would go and find it. He reached the barn and climbed up on to the top of the piles and lay down until he got his breath back. He continued to lie quietly until he could hear the tick of the watch and still, he lay in the quietness until he discerned where it actually was. The farmer's watch was found.

Stillness and silence isn't easy. So, start with a small time and build up. Reflect on the words of Psalm 46:10

Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am.
Be still and know,
BE STILL.

Sorrowful Journey

The Worship in the Wilderness team have produced a book for families looking at emotions. We, in the UK, are very reluctant to share emotions. Yet, in the Bible, we see Jesus full of joy and anger; we see Jesus cry and we see anguish and compassion.

Jesus wept. (John 11:35). Read the seven woes in Matthew 23:13-39. Jesus refers to the people appointed to teach God's Word as hypocrites, snakes and vipers; pretty strong language. What would he say to us in the Church today?

Jesus was angry. *When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." John 2:13-17 (NIV)*

Jesus was compassionate. Read John 8:1-11 and know the compassion Jesus showed.

Jesus got frustrated. *"You unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." Matthew 17:17 (NIV).* Can you feel Jesus' frustration here?!

Jesus felt joy. It was not all sorrow. Jesus shared great joy too! *At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Luke 10:21-22 (NIV).*

Jesus demonstrated sorrow and despair. *Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." Matthew 26:38-42 (NIV).*

Take time to consider your emotions, are you able to be really honest before God? We have had a week where we are encouraged to lament - passionately express our sorrow. How much passion do we bring to worship? Do you cry out? Do you share joy?

Try a time of crying out in joy or tears to God as He guides. Listen and feel for His response.

Sacrificial Journey

What are we really prepared to give up for God? Fortunately, God promises He will not ask of us more than we can manage, but that can still be significant.

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13 (ESV)

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." John 16:33 (ESV)

What God does require? The danger in today's world is that we are busy - but are we doing what God asks or do we justify our own behaviour? In this Lent season, when we have reflected on what we could either give up or do extra, did we seek God's will or go with what helped us?

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV)

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. Ephesians 5:1-2 (NKJV)

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name. Philippians 2:5-9 (NKJV)

You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:5 (NKJV)

Sacrifice for Obedience

As we travel through Lent, we are encouraged to make sacrifices, to look at what we can give up or do extra, but what about the rest of the year?

When we reflect on the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross, how can we not be moved to respond with a sacrifice of thanksgiving?

As a sacrifice of love and devotion, Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with some costly perfume (John 12:1-7).

At the feeding of the five thousand, a little boy gave up his lunch and the people were fed because Jesus blessed it. (Matthew 14:15-21).

Joshua offered a sacrifice of obedience, taking over from Moses to lead the children of Israel into the promised land. (Joshua 1:1-9).

In Micah, it says: *What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.* (Micah 6: 8).

Reflect on what that means for us today.

And do not forget to do good and to share with others for with such sacrifices God is pleased.
Hebrews 13:16 (NIV).

Think about your response to God. Pray about how He influences your decisions: how you manage your finances, how you care for the planet, how you use your time, how you care for others.

Prayerfully examine your priorities.

So, here's what I want you to do, God helping you. Take your everyday life - your sleeping, eating, going to work and walking around life - and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him.... Fix your eyes on Him... readily recognize what He wants from you and quickly respond to it. Romans 12:1-2 (The Message).

Truth Speaking Journey

What is truth and what is fake news?

Some thought Trump was God Sent and others the opposite. In the Bible, all sorts of people were used by God, but in all of that where is the Truth? Equally, even those who got it wrong often became great individuals for God. We have only to look at Paul, David and Moses who all did some dreadful things and yet who are seen as some of the greatest leaders.

Some people who acted for God did not believe but were still used by God for good.

'I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honour, though you do not acknowledge me'
Isaiah 45:4 (NIV)

Equally, the Word of God makes it clear, we cannot get away with doing what we like without consequences.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Matthew 7:21 (NIV)

We need to read God's Word to come to know truth. We need to be careful we do not select the bits we like to justify our truth but to be open to God speaking through our reading. The Bible is a Living Word, it does speak to differing situations and times. For passages you thought you knew intimately, you suddenly hear something new and refreshing; for God's Word, when we connect with it. responds to our situation. It brings transformation and growth. It refreshes, renews and enables.

He replied, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:20 (NIV)

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Psalm 107:1 (NIV)

Find some Truths in God's Word that are important to you.

How do we go about speaking out some of God's truths?

Consider, of the people you mix with, how many do you share your testimony or faith with? What stops you? Please remember to pray for the person first or we risk going in our strength and not God's.

Think about some recent conversations and explore how you could have appropriately taken the conversation to a place to include God naturally. It is important we do not force the issue but that it is so integrated into our being that it comes naturally. That requires us to be connected to God.

How has God helped you in the past, how do you remember and celebrate that fact?

Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. 1 Peter 3:15 (NLT)

So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. 2 Timothy 1:8 (NLT)

Approaching Holy Week

The Holy Week accounts are familiar to us:



Place yourself in one of the scenes, initially as an Observer, but then as one of the key characters. What do you feel? What do you say? How do you respond?

We have the benefit of knowing the end of the story which those people at the time did not.

How is your behaviour shaped by knowing the end of the story?

How do our Churches respond and how can we improve that response?

Final Reflections

How has God spoken to you through this time?

We started praying about 3 situations: Our Church, our World, ourselves.

Have you anything God wishes you to share? If so, please do so – you may be the one who has been given the Word we all need to hear. Send an email to stanhopemethodists@gmail.com. If you don't have access to email, please phone someone you know who can send an email for you.

Thank you for being part of this journey. God Bless