

Prayer in the Afternoon Hours

Jesus said “this then is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:9- 13)

The Lord’s Prayer has been the heartbeat of the church’s prayer down the centuries, and it is our privilege to pray it in the middle of this Day of Prayer and Fasting. As we do so we join with disciples around the world who are praying the same prayer as us in their different settings and in their various languages. It is a prayer that centres our attention on the Father from whom all good things come. It sets our prayer in worship and adoration as our first offering to the One who loves us. It prays big, for a heavenly kingdom to come on the face of the earth. And it prays wide, for what is on our tables and what is in our hearts. It reminds us that there is an enemy from whom we need the Father’s deliverance. It is a comprehensive prayer. A simple prayer. A prayer for all ages. A prayer for all times. And so we pray it now.

For each hour of the Day we are suggesting a scripture to reflect on and a topic for your prayer and intercession.

12.00 midday Matthew 6:5- 15 Make the Lord’s Prayer the centrepiece of this hour. Pray it slowly and repeatedly and let the Prayer inspire your prayer for the world, the church and for yourself and those around you. Let the Prayer be your prayer-guide. Go where it leads you. Pray what it inspires in you. Let it breath through you. Take a line and let it marinate in your spirit, until it becomes a rich and word-full or word-less prayer of adoration, or petition, or intercession, or confession. The whole world of prayer is here. It is a Jesus-taught world. This, He tells us, is how we should pray. In the secret place, To our Father. With few words. With forgiveness in our hearts. As Jesus Himself prayed.

1.00pm 1 Timothy 3:1- 13 Pray especially during this hour for leaders in the Church. Oversight of the church is a noble calling and a noble task. It is also a costly call to a servant ministry. A calling that is both deeply fulfilling and deeply demanding, and which brings with it its own temptations. It is a life in public view, a scrutinised life, a life that draws both plaudits and criticism, that can puff with pride and bring low with self-doubt. Pray for those whom God has called to leadership in your own church, and denomination. Pray for those in senior leadership regionally and nationally. Pray for the leaders of churches other than your own. And pray for those who are struggling, maybe secretly, silently. For those who will emerge from the lockdown drained of energy and bereft of vision, fearing for the changes ahead, unsure they can keep going. Pray for courage in all our leaders, for holiness, for prayerfulness, for wisdom. Pray for leaders spouses and families.

2.00pm Matthew 17:20- 24 Pray with Jesus in his highly priestly prayer for the unity of the church, “that all may be one”, as the Father is one with the Son and with the Spirit. Jesus clearly saw that one of the greatest threats to the mission of the church beyond Pentecost would be the disunity of the church. His prayer, our prayers down the centuries, will have mitigated this in ways we can’t see or imagine. It would have been so much worse without them! But still, we have struggled to get along. Still we have settled for shallow relationships, even while we call each other sister and brother. And our disunity and paper thin politeness

towards one another has made it difficult for onlookers to believe that we are any different to any other group with a shared interest. Pray for unity and deeper relationships at every level of the church. In your church. In your town or cluster of churches. Across denominations. With those who do church differently. Pray for unity, “so the world may believe”.

3.00pm Romans 10:13- 15 Having prayed for the church’s unity in the power of the Spirit it seems appropriate to go on and pray for the church’s mission in the power of the same Spirit. We are called to mission by Jesus, empowered for mission by the Spirit and commissioned to make new disciples and baptise them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is God’s work before ever it is ours. But what a privilege to be invited to join in! Please pray during this hour for a renewal in the churches that turns us outwards to demonstrate and speak the love of God to the world around us. How will they hear unless someone speaks to them? Pray for Spirit-inspired and Spirit-led mission in your neighbourhood and locality. Pray for the mission of your own church and for the church nationally to find a fresh confidence to make Jesus known in word and deed. Pray that we will see many people, young and old, becoming disciples today. Pray for God’s kingdom to come in every part of life and in every human life.

4.00pm 1 Corinthians 12:1- 11 For some bizarre reason many churches have thought that they can be healthy and flourish while ignoring or neglecting the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as though they are an optional add-on for those who like that sort of thing! Yet, the prophets point forward to them; Jesus uses them; and Paul teaches about them, as manifestations of the Spirit for the common good. They are gifts given for a purpose, and the church suffers as we leave them unattended and gathering dust. So, as we pray for the renewal of the church let’s pray that there will be a fresh rediscovery of the indispensability of the spiritual gifts, and an eager openness to receive them, delight in them, and use them to build up the church. Pray this for your own church. Pray it for the church at large. Pray it for yourself. They are the work of one and the same Spirit, who distributes them to each one, just as the Spirit determines.

5.00pm Acts 3:1- 10 Thank God that healing is built into the way that the creation works. And thank God that in the new creation the perfect healing of the age to come breaks into this present age, and the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life. Rejoice that the healing ministry of the church has flourished wherever the heaven-bringing work of the Holy Spirit has been recognised and welcomed, including in our own time. But pray that we never domesticate it; that we expect great things from a great God; and that the church learns to do the things that Jesus did, in the way that Jesus did them, in the power of the Spirit. Pray that God will refresh the ministry of healing in your own church and across the churches of the UK. Pray for those you know who need God’s healing today. Pray for those who suffer alone. Pray for those whose mental health and wellbeing has been strained during the lockdown. Pray for those who work in the NHS and other medical services.