

‘People of God’ Congregational Prayer Journey

28-Day Prayer Journey

‘Live a life worthy of the calling you have received.’

Paul to the Church at Ephesus | Ephesians 4 v.1



'People of God'

Congregational Prayer Journey

Week One: A CALLED PEOPLE | Ephesians 4:1-16

God calls us together to be His people in His Church. What an amazing privilege! This week's prayer prompts come from chapter 4 verses 1-16 of Paul's letter to the congregation in Ephesus. They help us to listen afresh to what God is calling us to be as His people in the life we share together in our congregation.

Day 1: A Called People: Called to live up to something | Ephesians 4:1

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

When God calls us to live and serve together in His Church, we receive an amazing gift of *people* and *possibilities*. We have other people around us who invest in our lives. In turn, we have the opportunity to invest in their lives. All sorts of things become possible for us that we could never do on our own in worshipping, learning, serving and reaching out to others together. Paul reminds us of the need for all of us to live up to this call to be part of something that is so much bigger than ourselves.

Give thanks to God for our congregation and all the people and possibilities that being part of it brings to your life. Pray that every member might live up to their calling to be part of something bigger than any one of us can be by ourselves as followers of Jesus.

Day 2: A Patient People: Called to humility, gentleness and love | Ephesians 4:2

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

In our congregation's life and work not everybody moves at our pace or in our ways. That means we need to be patient with each other. This is not an easy call to answer. It requires us to bear with each other and grow in the deep qualities of humility, gentleness and love.

Pray that relationships in our congregation might be marked with humility, gentleness, patience and love.

Day 3: A People at Peace: Called to be at one with each other | Ephesians 4:3-6

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

For all the talk about the importance of community in the church today, it remains a difficult thing to achieve. God calls all sorts of different people to be part of His Church. Unity is a fragile treasure to be nurtured and guarded with care.

Pray that in our congregation the 'one-ness' members share in Christ might bring you to live and work together as one body despite differing priorities, desires and opinions.

Day 4: A People Prepared: Called and equipped | Ephesians 4:7-12

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says:

*'When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people.*

(What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) 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.

God not only calls us to be His People, but equips and readies us to grow into His purposes for us as a congregation.

Give thanks that Christ, our Heavenly King, distributes a variety of gifts to us in our congregation that enable us to serve Him together. Think of the variety of gifts with which others bless you in our congregation's life and pray for those who use them.

Day 5: A Maturing People: Called to grow up together | Ephesians 4:13-14

... 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. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

God intends congregations to grow and mature in their life together. This enables them to hold steady when the wind and waves of challenge and distraction come.

Pray that our congregation might grow and mature together in its experience of Christ and in living out His love together. Ask God to help our congregation to avoid the distractions of the Evil One and hold its course in following Christ.

Day 6: A Truth-loving People: Called to be true-faced | Ephesians 4:15

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

We aren't always good at having honest conversations with one another in our congregation's life. Sometimes we think one thing, but say something else. We are *two-faced* when God would have us be *true-faced*, able to lovingly share what we really think with each other. That isn't easy and requires effort in building good, open, strong relationships with one another.

Pray that when differences of opinion arise in our congregation, ways might be found to strike this balance of truth and love. Ask God to help you build good, open, strong relationships that centre on Christ.

Day 7: A Working People: Called to live out our shared faith | Ephesians 4:16

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

When we are working well as a congregation, it looks like the pumping limbs of a world class athlete. That level of fitness and natural flow isn't achieved by accident. Neither is living out the faith we share in a coordinated way.

Pray that our congregation's life might be fit, healthy and able to flow to achieve together what God has called you to do.

Week Two: A MORE AWARE PEOPLE |

Romans 12:1-8

Sometimes in all of the busyness of our congregation's life and work we lose sight of the bigger picture of what God wants to do among us as His people. This week's prayer prompts come from chapter 12 verses 1-8 of Paul's letter to the congregation in Rome. They help us to see afresh the vision God has for our life together.

Day 8: A Forgiven People: Aware of God's mercy | Romans 12:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.

Sometimes as congregations we are so focused on the ever more difficult task of just keeping everything going that we lose our awareness of what it is all about. The wonder, joy and reality of God's forgiving mercy in Christ, in which we live and which we are working to share, slips from view. The drudgery of routine replaces delight in worshiping God with our lives.

Give thanks to God for the mercy He has shown us in Christ as His people. Ask God to help us to keep it in view as we live for and serve Him in our congregation's life and work.

Day 9: A Sacrificial People: Aware that all of life is worship | Romans 12:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.

Sometimes as congregations we talk and plan as though all of our witness takes place around the church building. Actually, only part of it happens there as we worship and through our programmes and activities. God challenges us to become equally aware of the opportunities each member has to live in ways which please Him and promote His good news out in society when the gates are closed, the doors are locked and the lights are out.

Give thanks to God for all the avenues and circumstances of life in which He scatters members of our congregation to be His witnesses in their daily lives. Pray that others might know and experience something of God through lives that look different and lead them to think about Him.

Day 10: A Transformed People: Aware of what forms us | Romans 12:2

Do not conform 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.

Sometimes the way we think, speak and act as congregations is shaped more by the ways of the world around us than by God's ways and will for us. Often that happens so subtly that we aren't even aware of how much the world is forming our approach to things. God wants us to be transformed into His new, good, perfect and pleasing ways as we live and work together for Him.

Pray that God would make us more aware of the moments when the ways we think and do things are being increasingly shaped by the world's ways. Ask that He would help our congregation be more and more transformed into His new, good, perfect and pleasing ways for us as His people.

Day 11: A Humble People: Aware of our limitations | Romans 12:3

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

Sometimes as we live and work in our congregation we can begin to think, speak and act as if our ideas, voice and ways of doing things are the only ones that matter. Actually, all of us bring only a limited awareness of what God wants us to learn together from one another as His people. We all bring a bit of what He wants us to see and be – but only a bit.

Pray that God would help our congregation to learn to listen and look together for God's voice and vision emerging by His Spirit speaking and showing the way among us as His people.

Day 12: A Together People: Aware of our contributions | Romans 12:4-5

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Sometimes we both underestimate and overestimate our contributions to the life and work of our congregation. One extreme causes us to sell God short, the other causes us to get in His way. Whatever contribution we have to bring is always for the good of everyone else, not for self-promotion. When we all remember this we become more aware and appreciative of our part and the part that others play in what God is doing among us as His people.

Pray that God would help every member to gracefully contribute what God has given them to bring to our congregation's life and work. Ask that each person would also have the grace to know the parts they are not meant to play.

Day 13: A Sharing People: Aware of God's gifting | Romans 12:6-8

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is

to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Sometimes we wish we could do what others can do in our congregation's life and witness. Usually that means we would like to do something more up front – playing an instrument, speaking or being an influential leader. Paul's examples of different gifts remind us to be equally aware and appreciative of the quieter, behind the scenes, gifts of serving, encouraging and giving.

Give thanks for those who serve, encourage and support the work of our congregation in behind the scenes ways. Pray that what they share would be appreciated and that they would be blessed in what they do with the grace given to them.

Day 14: A Cheerful People: Aware of our mood music | Romans 12:8

... do it cheerfully.

Sometimes it feels like we are living in an age of constant background music. Usually, we are only faintly aware of what is playing and providing the mood music for our everyday activities. But mood music matters. It subtly sets the tone of how we feel about things. It is like that in our congregation's life too. That's why we are challenged to do all that we do cheerfully. Things done with a smile on our faces, a song in our hearts and a smattering of good craic bring honour to God and life to His people.

Pray that God would make us more aware of the mood in our congregation's life. Where it is upbeat, thank God for His presence in our life together. Where it is downbeat, ask God to bring back the cheerfulness of awareness of His presence among us.

Week Three: AN APPRECIATIVE PEOPLE |

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

Being part of our congregation's life and witness year after year can become so familiar that we no longer appreciate being part of the people of God. This week's prayer prompts come from chapter 5 verses 12-18 of Paul's first letter to the congregation in Thessalonica. They help us to appreciate afresh the experience that God opens up to us in being part of our congregation's life together.

Day 15: An Appreciative People: Appreciating those who lead | 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

Leadership in the church is no easy task these days. More and more demands seem to fall on less and less shoulders. We face questions congregations have never had to even think about before. A consumer mentality means everybody expects to have everything their way. It is so easy to criticise those who God calls to lead as ministers, elders, in congregational committee and in church organisations. Leadership demands all the things Paul mentions here – hard work, care and sometimes challenge and warning. There are many ways we can show our appreciation for leaders in our congregation. We can appreciate the difficulties of their role and love them. We can make their job easier by trying to avoid win lose situations and living at peace with each other. Of course, we also need to pray for those who lead.

Give thanks to God for those who step up to answer God's call to lead in a whole variety of ways in our congregation. Pray that all who lead will know God's leading, guiding, wisdom, strength and grace.

Day 16: An Encouraging People: Appreciating the circumstances of others | 1 Thessalonians 5:14

And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

All of us go through different seasons in our walk of faith and appreciate the help that comes from being part of a congregation that travels with us. Sometimes we need to be brought back into line when our lives have got out of step with God. At other times we need to be comforted, consoled, lifted up – even carried along – on the care and prayer of our church family. All of this is a form of encouragement that enables us to continue on the journey of following Jesus.

Give thanks for our church family. Pray for those who especially need to be encouraged at this time. Ask that the right people will find the right words to help in the right way.

Day 17: A Forgiving People: Appreciating we all need grace | 1 Thessalonians 5:15

Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong.

In our congregation, as in any community, people will wrong one another and feel wronged. It happens in what we say, the attitudes we adopt and the things we do. Sometimes it comes through our actions towards one another, at others, our reactions to things that happen. Hurt is real. Forgiveness is hard. Grace, both offered and received, is needed. Appreciating that we all need grace and forgiveness makes us better at offering it to others.

Pray for relationships that have become strained, gone cold or got broken in our congregation. Ask that God would enable the giving and receiving of grace, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Day 18: A Kind People: Appreciating ways to do good | 1 Thessalonians 5:15

... always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

Kindness is goodness in action. It seeks out, and finds ways of doing good to others. Often it is taken for granted. We need to appreciate ways of doing good to others and the kindness shown to us.

Thank God for all the kindnesses shown to us in little and large ways through being part of the people of God in our congregation. Ask God to show you ways to do what is good for others.

Day 19: A Joyful People: Appreciating the value of celebration | 1 Thessalonians 5:16

Rejoice always...

Sometimes we aren't very good at appreciating what God is doing in and through our congregation's life and witness. We don't take time to stop to notice. We only have eyes for what is difficult and not going well. God calls us to be a people who are realistic about the challenges, but also able to rejoice in and celebrate the signs of His presence and blessing.

Thank God for the signs of His presence and blessing in our congregation's life and work. Ask Him to give you eyes to see what He is doing and so add a note of celebration to our life together.

Day 20: A Prayerful People: Appreciating that God is at work | 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Pray continually...

God calls us to be a prayerful people who appreciate that we must depend upon Him. In things we have been doing for a long time, or that we seem to be able to manage by ourselves, we can easily come to trust in our own ability. When times are tough and the going is hard, we sometimes try everything else and only when all else fails do we turn to prayer. Often God is not at work because we aren't asking Him to be. At other times we need to pray believing He is and will be at work even though we can't see it at the moment.

Give thanks to God that He works in and through our congregation's life and witness. Ask that He would keep us prayerfully dependent on Him and expectant of His power at all times.

Day 21: A Thankful People: Appreciating God's silver linings | 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Often God is to be found in the silver linings that come in our congregation's life and work. Circumstances can seem dark and yet God's presence and love appears through the gaps in the clouds. In these moments, we can especially appreciate that God's will is not the way we would want things to be and yet still find reasons to be thankful.

Pray that God would help our congregation appreciate that He is with you in times of both sunshine and shadow. Ask Him to keep you a thankful people.

Week Four: A SENT PEOPLE |

Matthew 10:1-16

For a long time our witness as congregations operated on a 'they'll come to us' basis. We opened our doors for worship each Sunday and organisations throughout the week and the community came in to our buildings to move among us as the People of God and hear what we had to say about Him. This is happening less and less. As a result, we are finding that we need to rediscover our 'sentness' as the People of God. This week's prayer prompts come from Jesus' teaching to his first followers in Matthew chapter 10 verses 1-16. They help us to experience afresh the challenge of being sent to share the Church's life and message with others.

Day 22: A Sent People: Sent on a mission | Matthew 10:1-5

Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and illness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out...

The idea of being sent out takes a bit of getting used to. It means going instead of staying. It feels like the game taking place on away ground, rather than our home territory. It means we aren't as in control of the programme and script of what it looks like to live and speak for Jesus. All of that can feel unfamiliar, uncomfortable and challenging. But it is also refreshing, exciting and a great opportunity.

Pray that God would help our congregation make the most of the times and activities which still draw the community to worship and mix with us in our buildings. Ask God to help us overcome our fears and unease of being sent out to bear witness for Him.

Day 23: A Going People: Sent to particular places and people | Matthew 10:5-6

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel."

When God sends us out to be His witnesses, it always pays off to think about the people to whom we are going. What is our community like? Who are the people we are trying to reach? What is their story? Where might we be points of connection that meet them where they are in their lives and in their thinking about God?

Think about the community around our church? What are its needs? What is its attitude to God? Ask God to help our congregation find ways to share its life and the message of Jesus with others just where God has placed you.

Day 24: A People with a Message: Sent with something to say | Matthew 10:7

As you go, proclaim this message: "The kingdom of heaven has come near."

As we go about our daily lives most of us speak thousands of words. We send so many messages by what we say and what we choose not to say. The tone and tenor of our speech can have a big impact on others. And then there are those moments when opportunities arise to share a story that surprises, ask a question which penetrates beneath the surface or say something specifically about God. In all these ways the kingdom of heaven comes near through what we say.

Ask God that members of our congregation might speak with the accent of His kingdom. Pray for particular opportunities in conversation that allow us to introduce what we believe with wisdom, grace and power.

Day 25: A Caring People: Sent to help | Matthew 10:8

Heal those who are ill, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

The actions in these verses hardly sound like every day occurrences in the life and witness of our congregation. However, they do point to something we can all do as the People of God – care for others in need. In today's harsh and selfish world we should never underestimate the impact on others when help is offered freely.

Ask God to make our congregation a place which others find overflowing with His care for them and their concerns. Pray that such care might prove to be a sign of His kingdom in their lives.

Day 26: A Trusting People: Sent with everything we need | Matthew 10:9-10

Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts – no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep.

Often we feel ill-equipped to go out into today's world as witnesses. We fear the inadequacies of what we do or say will be shown up. We compare what our congregation can do with other bigger churches and despair that it can make a difference. Jesus reminds us, as He did with His first disciples, that He supplies us with everything we need for the work and witness to which He calls us.

Pray that God would help our congregation clearly identify the work and witness to which God is calling it at this time. Ask that you would find Him supplying all our needs.

Day 27: A People of Blessing: Sent to bring God's peace | Matthew 10:11-15

Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

As the people of God, He sends us to be, and bring, His blessing to the world. We have the peace of God to share. As these verses show, this happens person by person and home by home as we simply move among others with whom God brings us into contact. However, we also have to learn to live with the pain of the apathy and rejection of those to whom we have shown love.

Pray that our congregation will prove to be a blessing and bring God's peace to the lives of those whose doors God opens to you. Ask that God will help you persevere in His work when the pain of apathy or rejection comes.

Day 28: A Vulnerable People: Sent with sensitivity | Matthew 10:16

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

Being sent as God's people is not for the fainthearted or foolish. It often feels difficult and dangerous. It requires that we show wisdom and understanding in how we relate to others and deal with tricky situations which arise. The vulnerable place in which this puts us pushes us back to rely upon God for the mixture of strength and sensitivity, boldness and blamelessness, that is required.

Pray that God would lead and guide our congregation in how it relates to today's culture, the community it serves and the people with whom it comes into contact. Ask that God's mix of strength and sensitivity, boldness and blamelessness, might be seen in all you do and say.