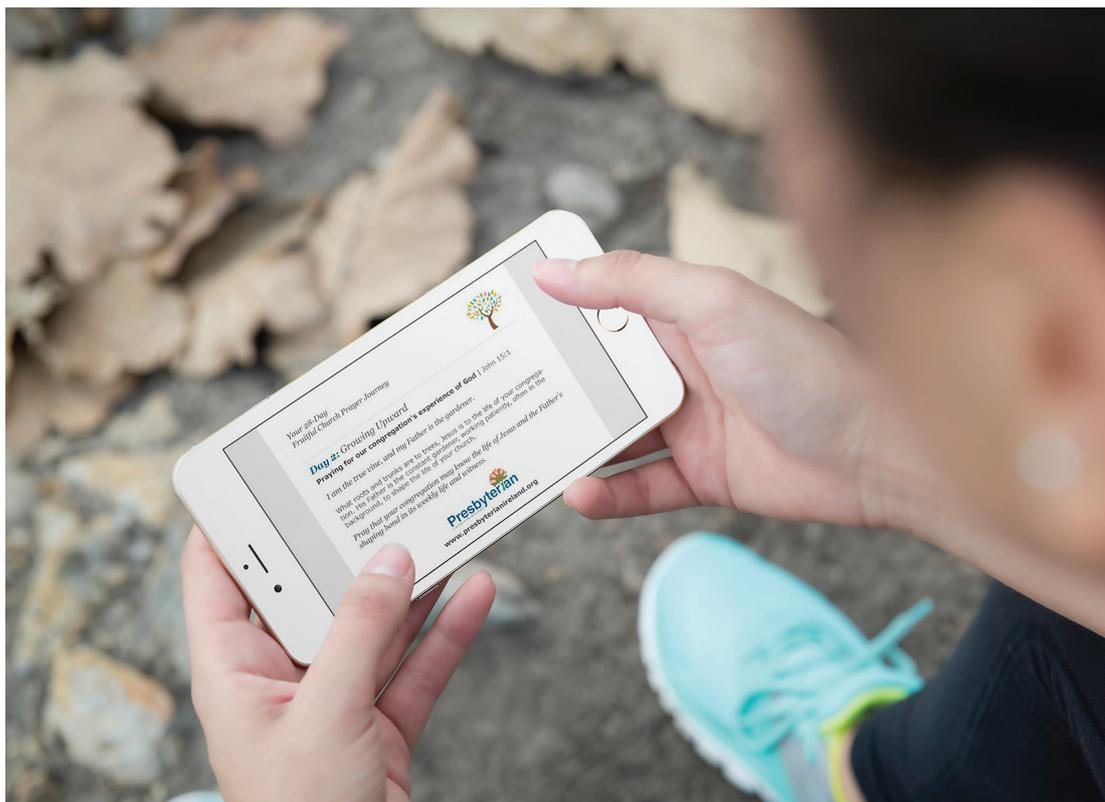


Fruitful Congregations

28-Day Prayer Journey



A new way of stimulating and gathering prayer
for every aspect of congregational life



Produced by the Council for Congregational Life and Witness

Introduction

The Fruitful Church Prayer Journey has been designed for congregations to use together, or for individual personal devotions, that prompt and focus prayer around a collective theme of 'Fruitful Congregations'.

This 28-day journey is not time bound or date specific, so you can start the first short daily devotional and prayer prompt on a date that suits you.

The areas of church life covered in the Prayer Journey are:

- Fruitful congregations – Jesus' plan for our congregation
- Following Jesus – Discipleship
- Learning to Follow Jesus – Leadership
- Coming to Jesus – Pastoral Care
- Centred on Jesus – Worship
- Together with Jesus – Church Family
- Going for Jesus – Outreach
- Seeing like Jesus – Global Mission.

The Journey can act as a great way to start the new Church year in prayer as a congregation, or to use as a special season of prayer at any time.

If you would like to receive each short daily devotional and prayer prompt directly to your mobile device or computer you can sign up via the Church website www.presbyterianireland.org/prayerjourney where you can choose your personal start date.



Day 1: Fruitful Congregations

Jesus' plan for your congregation | John 15:1-8

¹"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

How are things in your congregation these days? I wonder how we would answer that question. We could answer it based on numbers of people coming to the services on Sunday or taking part in the organisations. We could make a judgement based on age profile or how our finances are adding up. Perhaps we find ourselves drifting in another direction altogether, assessing things on how we feel about church just now. Maybe we are defensive at the very thought of the question and fall back to saying that we are doing our best under difficult circumstances.

Whatever size your congregation is, whatever situation it ministers in, Jesus has a plan for it – fruitfulness! Fruitfulness is more than mere faithfulness in the rapidly changing world. It may often look like less than success in the eyes of a superficial world. It is always the growth of a Kingdom that is not of this world.

Fruitfulness is the outward expression of the life of God within. Jesus describes how it comes about in terms of His life flowing through His people in the way that vines carry life to branches. So let's remember that 'the root of the matter' of the life of any congregation is always Christ. Branches bear fruit by remaining in Him.

Another word for 'remaining' in some translations of these verses is 'abiding'. It speaks of the idea of living, having our abode, making our home, with and in Christ. When we do that, fruitfulness is promised. When we don't, fruitfulness is impossible.

Ultimately, congregations are communities that gather around Jesus to have the sort of relationship with Him in which His words are welcomed home to our hearts and so shape our lives that our greatest desire is to be fruitful for Him.

Pray for your congregation, whatever size it is or shape you feel it's in. Ask God to make your congregation more than faithful, not necessarily something that looks successful, but truly fruitful – outwardly expressing the life of God which flows within.



Day 2: Growing upward

Praying for our congregation's experience of God | John 15:1

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

What roots and trunks are to trees, Jesus is to the life of your congregation. His Father is the constant gardener, working patiently, often in the background, to shape the life of your church.

Pray that your congregation may know the life of Jesus and the Father's shaping hand in its weekly life and witness.

Day 3: Growing in rootedness

Praying for our congregation's life | John 15:4

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Sometimes we find ourselves going through the motions in our congregational life. Our worship becomes routine; our leadership weary; our discipleship faltering; our pastoral care superficial. It has life in name only. It bears no fruit.

Pray that in your congregation's life together, the vitality of Jesus may remain and be renewed during this season of prayer.



Day 4: Growing outward

Praying for our congregation's witness | John 15:8

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Fruitfulness in our congregation's life together is meant to show itself in witness to others. Like a bumper crop, it is not meant to be hoarded but shared with our neighbours and friends. Sometimes our bearing fruit happens as others come to faith. At other times it is seen in a growing influence for God in our community.

Pray that your congregation's fruitfulness may draw the attention of an increasingly barren world, so that it sees the abundance of life Christ promises to those who follow Him.

Day 5: Growing conditions: The weather

Praying for the culture around us | Acts 17:16

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.

The gardener has no control over the weather, but carefully works in harmony with it, as far as possible, to see a fruitful harvest. God has placed your congregation in a unique place and time. Think about what helps and hinders you growing the Kingdom of God where you are right now.

Pray that you can discern what God has sent you to do in your community today to help the Gospel grow. Also, pray for what needs to be changed in your local culture.



Day 6: Growing conditions: The soil

Praying for hearts | Luke 8:15

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

What does our congregation really treasure most? That's the clue to its heart! What do people fight over or complain about? Often that reveals what matters most to them. What would it look like for your congregation to march to the beat of God's heart?

Pray that your congregation will honestly examine its heart, repent of sin, and refocus on the spiritual disciplines.

Day 7: Growing conditions: Preparing, planting, watering

Praying for our part | 1 Corinthians 3:8

The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour.

Different soils are good for differing crops, but they all need to be well prepared and cared for. From soil preparation to harvest is a long process of hard work with many steps along the way. Building God's Kingdom involves everyone using their gifts, time and talents together.

Pray that your congregation will help people discover and use their gifts and talents in a supportive, encouraging family environment.



Day 8: Following Jesus: Discipleship

Praying that we may answer the call | Matthew 4:18-22

¹⁸As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ²⁰At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²²and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

There is something of the echo of how God created the world in how Jesus calls disciples to follow Him. He just speaks and ‘it is so.’ That was true for His first disciples, Peter, Andrew, James and John and it remains true for us today. We hear Christ’s call, ‘come, follow me’, and it rings with irresistible power. However, that’s just the start of it! It sets us on the life-long adventure of seeking to hear, see and follow Jesus whatever circumstances we find ourselves in at any particular time.

Sometimes those circumstances are dictated by age and stage of life, at others by the setting in which Jesus places us to live or work. Still other periods of the journey are defined by times of unusual blessing and opportunity or unanticipated struggle and challenge.

Members of our congregation find their lives marked by all sorts of discipleship challenges right now. For some it is the struggle to follow Jesus as they move from childhood into teenage years. For others it is leaving home for the first time, or transitioning from education to working life or unemployment. Marriage, living with singleness, parenthood, childlessness, the onset of middle age all bring their own particular challenges. Retirement, family bereavement and declining health in later years represent a further set of twists and turns on the road of following Christ. There are as many different journeys of discipleship as there are people, because all of our lives take on their own particular pattern, shaped from eternity by God’s design.

As disciples, we not only step out and answer Christ’s call to follow, but are continually listening for His voice of comfort and direction throughout our lives.

Pray for particular members and groups of people in your congregation that they might continue to hear the voice of Jesus and keep on following Him through all ages and stages of life.



Day 9: Discipleship

Praying for the leaving and going | Genesis 12:1

The Lord had said to Abram: 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'

The Lord asks Abram to surrender totally to His purposes. Abram is told to leave the country where he is secure, the people among whom he is comfortable, and the family members whom he loves. Yet by leaving these behind and going where God leads, even greater blessing lies ahead.

Pray that in your congregation's life there may be an increasing desire to hear the voice of Jesus Christ our Lord, and to follow where He leads as we fulfil His purposes in our generation.

Day 10: Discipleship

Praying for the journey | Mark 8: 34-35

³⁴Then he (Jesus) called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it.'

Jesus wants us to follow him in the purposes, priorities and patterns of our lives. This requires our daily decision to put Jesus first, not ourselves and our own interests, as we tell and live out the full gospel in our ordinary, everyday lives. It will be costly, but it is the only way to true life, now and in eternity.

Pray that in your congregation's life there may be a growing desire to die to self-interest, and an increasingly distinctive and attractive Christ-centred way of living out and telling the Gospel.



Day 11: Learning from Jesus: Leadership

Praying for leaders who follow the Leader | Hebrews 12:1-2

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

As a child I had an astronomical telescope which gave dramatic views of the moon and other celestial wonders such as the phases of the Venus. But it could be very frustrating to use. It was difficult to focus and, worse than that, it kept swinging off target. In these verses from Hebrews we are called to fix our eyes on Jesus. But like my old telescope our vision of him can be blurred or even lost for a time. We all need to keep our lives centred on Christ as we run the race marked out for us. We especially need our leaders to have their direction set by him. Otherwise not just they, but we who they lead, can lose the way.

Sin so easily entangles. Leaders in particular can become caught up in their sense of success or their frustration at a lack of success. As a result, the temptation to lead with their own wisdom can be overwhelming. All the more reason to rely on Christ. He identifies with us in the struggles we face. He remained wholly committed to his purpose even to the point of death on a cross because of his certain hope in the joy of what lay ahead – our redemption.

Thank God for your leaders (and for the privilege of leadership if you are one) - Minister and Kirk Session, organisation leaders, small group leaders and others, in formally recognised positions or not, who are gifted by God to lead people to advance God's kingdom.

Pray that Christ would be continually perfecting their faith.

Pray that nothing would knock your leaders off-track or cause them to lose their focus on Jesus and that they would know his grace and strength every day.



Day 12: Leadership

Praying for leaders who live and teach the truth | 1 Timothy 4:16

"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

Salvation for ourselves and others is a shared and common hope. In this we must never neglect the importance of how we live and the truths we hold. Indeed a consistent godly life of faithful biblical teaching is the context in which salvation is seen in our lives and in those who 'hear' us.

Pray that all in your congregation who are leaders - either by position or influence - will carefully and consistently point people to Jesus by how they live and what they teach.

Day 13: Leadership

Praying for the development of young leaders | 2 Timothy 3:14-16

¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...

Developing the next generation of leaders doesn't just happen, they have to be grown. We must plant the seeds of God's word deep in the hearts of our young people and seek to live out our faith with integrity amongst them.

Pray that your congregation might be more intentional in identifying and nurturing young leaders, releasing the gifts that God has given them so that they might be a blessing to the Church.



Day 14: Coming to Jesus: Pastoral Care

Praying for the weary and burdened | Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

One day, while walking in the Andes Mountains in South America, I was overcome by a sense of utter weariness. I could hardly lift one foot in front of the other. The lack of oxygen at nearly 5000 metres above sea level was taking its toll. Apart from realising it would be dangerous to continue upwards, I also appreciated an important lesson: I didn't have to do this! I was on holiday to enjoy the mountains, not to cause myself to suffer.

These words of Jesus speak a similar message. Many people really don't have to carry the burdens they take on. Jesus offers a different way. It's not to do nothing at all, but to take on his yoke which is easy and his burden which is light. A story that follows in Matthew's gospel illustrates this; Jesus challenges the heartless restrictions the Pharisees had on working on that Sabbath. In opposition to the heavy burden of those rules, Jesus allows his disciples to pick grain to eat and then heals a man with a shrivelled hand.

Are you weary and burdened today or do you know people in your congregation who are?

Maybe weary from trying to do too much – pray for a time of rest and refreshing from God.

Perhaps worn out from trying too hard to achieve something with little or no results – pray they would trust and hope fully in Christ.

Burdened by guilt or a feeling of not being good enough – pray they would know the grace of Jesus in their lives.

Weary because they have forgotten that there are some things we don't have to do - pray they would find a new way, a new purpose in Christ.

Pray all your prayers in the confidence that whatever we bring to Jesus, none of it is too much for him.



Day 15: Pastoral Care

Praying for those who carry others to Jesus | Mark 2:3-5

³Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. ⁵When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

The word compassion literally means 'with suffering'. The Bible says eight times that Jesus was moved with compassion. So were the four friends of the paralyzed man in this story. Their compassion moved them to action in carrying their friend to Jesus so that he could experience the presence and power of God in his situation. They aligned themselves with the suffering of their friend. They weren't scared to encounter his suffering. They weren't embarrassed by it. They didn't seek to avoid it. They entered right into it. Pastoral care in our congregation is meant to do the same. It calls us to put ourselves out to do whatever it takes to share the burden of others who are suffering. We do that in bringing them to Jesus in prayer and bringing something of His love to them in our actions.

Pray that your congregation may be a place in which sufferers are brought to Jesus in prayer and in which His love is brought to them in action.

Day 16: Pastoral Care

Praying for grace for the needy | 2 Corinthians 12:9

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Sometimes in situations of suffering God brings relief. At others He doesn't and won't. He has a higher purpose – that we may know His grace and power in our lives. In such circumstances, the unasked for gift of suffering, and the trial and weakness that goes with it, becomes a display of the life of Christ in us and through us. To see that and find peace in God's plan for us requires the pastoral support and prayer of God's people.

Thank God for those in your congregation who exhibit the grace and power of Christ in their suffering. Pray that you and others may find ways to encourage and support them.



Day 17: Centred on Jesus: Worship

Praying for eyes to see the glory of Jesus | Revelation 1:10-18

¹⁰On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

¹²I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man,^[a] dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash round his chest. ¹⁴The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

The challenges were many: Persecution from an empire hungry to claim divine honour: False prophets undermining the established Christians with sophisticated philosophy: Men and women lowering the moral standards of the church. Revelation shows the varied and multiple tactics used by Satan to attack the church: physical, intellectual and moral. Is it any different today?

That's why John Stott writes: 'A church with its back to the wall, fighting for survival, needs more than moral exhortation and pious entreaty; it must see Christ.'

Why is this important? Because Paul says, the Lord Jesus has become 'for us wisdom from God' (1 Corinthians 1:30.) He has the true understanding of life and how to live it.

Pause for a moment and reflect on the words of this hymn:

'Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face.

And the things on earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace'

In today's verses from Revelation chapter 1, John's focus is drawn to the presence of Jesus, the one like a son of man from Daniel 7. He had the robe and golden girdle of a priest. His face was as radiant as the sun. However this vision had a purpose: It was to be shared with the whole church. It's interesting that John's first glimpse is not of Jesus but of the light on the lampstands (v.12). These lamp stands represent the churches. If churches are to be living witnesses for Jesus, we must remain in Christ's presence drawing from His true light.

This vision overwhelmed John and he fell at his feet as though dead but Jesus touches him and says: "Do not be afraid." He affirms he is God of the living and the resurrected. He affirms victory over death and equips John for the task ahead.

Pray that the worship in your congregation will have Jesus at the centre so that you can reflect his light in the darkness of this world.



Day 18: Worship

Praying for expectancy and joy in worship | Psalm 122: 1-2

¹I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!" ²Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!

Those who have little time for God during the week, have little time for Him on Sunday.

To worship God is to declare, with our lips and our lives, with our desires and our choices, that God is our greatest treasure.

Pray for your congregation's worship, that God will be your greatest delight and richest treasure.

Day 19: Worship

Praying for our response to worship | James 1:22

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Reading the book on healthy eating is good, but it needs to affect our diet.

Watching the fitness video is good, but we need to get exercise.

Reading and hearing God's Word is good, but we need to do what it says.

Pray for your congregation, that there will be a closing of the gap between hearing and doing; between reflecting in worship and responding in our everyday lives.



Day 20: Together around Jesus: Church Family

Praying for inclusion and integration of all ages | Matthew 18:1-2

¹At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ²He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

What would a church with only children in it be like? It wouldn't be quiet for a start, but that's not quite what Jesus had in mind! What He does require of us is to display attitudes which come from having a child-like faith. Attitudes of trust and a humble approach to God, yes; but also attitudes which accept we are no more important than anyone else but need one another. Recognising that Jesus is the one on whom we all depend means we can all relax and just be ourselves, without putting on a 'church facade.' Understanding that we all serve Jesus means we will also serve one another, overlooking no one, regardless of age or background - simply being members of God's family, his trusting children.

What might it look like if people in your congregation showed attitudes of a child-like faith? A lady in the choir winks discretely at the bored 8 year old. A 15 year old girl sits on the floor playing with a bunch of pre-school children. An elder stops youth club kids in the street to say "hello" to them by name. A little boy sits beside the oldest man in the congregation just as if he was his real granddad. Everyone does the actions to the children's song without embarrassment because that's just what we do. A queue of adults waits to affirm a teenager who took part in the church service, as proud of them as if they were their own relative.

Those pictures speak of family. If you see that kind of thing happening in your church more frequently, it is probably a sign that you are becoming more like a family. It's also a sign that people are learning from the children to develop a child-like faith as members of the family of God.

Pray that people in your congregation would develop a child-like faith and commit to serving one another in humility as members of God's family. Ask God to help the adults learn from the children so that everyone develops attitudes of dependence and unconditional family love.



Day 21: Children, young people and young adults

Praying for the passing on of the faith | Deuteronomy 6:6-7

⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Often we have let the church take the responsibility to teach our children and young people about faith. The Bible tells us though that Sunday mornings are probably not enough to teach children and young people what it really means to be followers of Jesus. We need to encourage this teaching to happen over the 168 hours in their week.

Pray that your congregation will better support parents as they aim to share and model faith to their children day to day.

Day 22: Men and Women

Praying for the contribution of men and women | Genesis 1:27

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Men and women are created in the image of God, having intellect, a moral nature, the power to communicate and an emotional nature that is above and beyond instinct. They were created compatible and to compliment one another to the glory of God and in reflecting His likeness.

Pray that men and women in your congregation will glorify God in their thinking, behaviour and communication in their individual lives and in their life together.



Day 23: Going for Jesus: Outreach

Praying for the love to share our lives with the lost | 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

Sometimes in our witness as congregations we can fool ourselves into thinking that we can reach out to others with the love of God, but do so from a safe distance. We put up a text on the church noticeboard, but never come out of the doors to rub shoulders with the local community. We give someone gospel literature, but prefer not to have to engage them in conversation. We run a very 'set piece' programme in our organisation in which the message of the gospel is slotted in at the same time every week, but we never talk about Jesus in the 'open play' of our real life encounters with those who come.

Often we put this down to not being very gifted evangelists, or not having the words to say, or being shy and retiring. Perhaps the truth is that our love for others simply isn't great enough to cause us to stretch ourselves beyond our own comfort zones. We want to share the gospel of God, but keep our lives to ourselves.

Writing to the Thessalonian Christians, Paul reminded them of the time when he and his companions lived among them. In how they lived as witnesses they shared, not just a message of God's love, but their very lives with them. Indeed, they were delighted to do so.

In living like this among others who they were committed to reach with the gospel, they were following the example of Jesus Himself. He came into our world and lived among us so as to share the Father's love by the giving of His very life. He didn't do it from a distance. He did it up close and personal. He did it by involving Himself in the lives of others and letting them into His life. He did it at enormous cost to Himself.

If our congregation is to go *for* Jesus in outreach it will need to be committed to go *like* Jesus in outreach. There is no way to do outreach from a safe distance. It always calls us to loving self-sacrifice.

Pray that your congregation will find ways to share its life with others in ways which show, as well as speak about, the love of God in Christ.



Day 24: Outreach

Praying for the right words and tone to our witness | 1 Peter 3:15

For it is God's will that by doing good we should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

The gospel is good news. We are to be gospel people. People who bring good news, live good news and proclaim good news. People who demonstrate and display God's grace and love to those we encounter daily.

Pray that your congregation would be able to display God's love in increasing measure and that you and others would shine brightly in the world around you.

Day 25: Outreach

Praying for boldness in our witness | Ephesians 6:19

Pray also for me that whenever I open my mouth words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel

What if I say the wrong thing to her? What if I make things worse? What if I offend him? When it comes to sharing the good news there are often so many *what ifs* that we never speak. But what if you are the one God has sent, with the words He has given you? What if God would work through you just as He has promised...?

Pray that God would give courage to His church. Pray that you, and your congregation, would be confident in Christ and bold in speaking in His name and for His glory



Day 26: Seeing like Jesus: Global Mission

Praying that we may share Christ's Vision for the world | Revelation 7:9-12

⁹After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰And they cried out in a loud voice "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

¹¹All the angels were standing round the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, ¹²saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

Sometimes when we are hard at work we just need to stand back and see the big picture. In the middle ages three stonemasons working on a project were asked what they were doing. The first answered "I'm working with stones." The second said "I'm providing for my family." The third said "I'm building a cathedral!"

Desiring to be fruitful in our individual life and the life of our congregation is commendable in itself, but sometimes we need to know that we are doing more than tending a plant or a field. We are part of God's plan to fill a new heaven and earth with his angels and people. And the final result of God's salvation work here and now is just as certain as that moment when it was "finished" on a cross at Calvary!

Modern technology enables us to be instantly connected to our brothers and sisters around the world as never before. The stories of their trials and fruitfulness can fuel our prayers and rekindle our passion for a lost and broken world around us on our doorstep, to the ends of the earth and to the end of the age. Their lives of faith challenge our shallowness as they utterly depend on God for their daily bread and existence. They tell us that salvation really does belong to God alone.

Your congregation is a smaller, imperfect version of that final, perfect worshipping community described in these verses. A fruitful congregation will always be one which gets the big picture and actively plays its part in it where it can, locally and to the ends of the earth. As we do so, we are all the time praying expectantly, "even so Lord, come!"

Pray for your congregation to stand back and get the big picture of what God is doing in our world until Jesus returns. Pray that the congregation will find its part in that story and enjoy celebrating the Lord's harvest of people across our world today.



Day 27: Global Mission

Praying that we would respond to the needs of others | Acts 16: 9-10

⁹During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Receiving an invitation is normally a delight. Not responding can simply seem rude. Hearing a cry for help is startling. Ignoring it can be a matter of life or death. Paul's response to the invitation he received was not, 'you come to us and hear the gospel'. Rather, it was, 'let us go to them with the gospel'.

Pray that your congregation may not only hear the cry of the needy, but that you may continue to respond to God in prayer, giving and getting involved in taking the gospel in word and deed to the ends of the earth.

Day 28: Global Mission

Praying for the spread of the gospel | Acts 10:34-35

³⁴Then Peter began to speak: "I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism ³⁵but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right".

God has no favourites, therefore His impartiality can challenge us, surprise us, and maybe even irritate us. Yet it can also excite us, envision us and motivate us to play our part in ensuring 'every nation' hears and receives the gospel.

Pray that your congregation may be challenged, excited and envisioned as you remember God's promises to the nations. Pray that God may break down barriers in our hearts and minds to our joining in what He is doing in the world.



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