

## Hands Together Through Prayer II Corinthians 1:7-14; Matthew 6:9-13; John 17



There are more than one hundred references to prayer in the Scriptures which indicate the importance of prayer in our lives. In this study we will allow for prayer time in order for us to actively have time to pray.

Most of us have had experiences in our lives when we felt a deep need for others to pray for us – an illness, the loss of a loved one or perhaps there was a significant decision to be made. It is one of the most moving experiences in our Christian life to have someone pray for us or with us.

In II Corinthians 1:7-14, Paul is in much the same situation. He had suffered many hardships in the Province of Asia and was under great pressure, far beyond his ability to endure, so that he despaired even of life. He wanted the Corinthians to join their prayers with his – become prayer partners with him. A prayer partner offers a source of great spiritual support and inspiration. If you do not have a prayer partner, ask for God's guidance in choosing one.

### Hands Together through Prayer

Leader – Have the group divide into pairs (or threes) to have time to prayer together for the following:

- 1) those who are in physical pain,
- 2) those experiencing sadness,
- 3) those seeking direction for their lives,
- 4) those in despair for any reason,
- 5) other needs....

In his Kerygama study guide, *Lord Teach Us to Pray*, John C. Purdy makes a beautiful comparison of some of Jesus' parables to the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. We commonly call this the Lord's Prayer.

Jesus told about a woman who leavened a large lump of dough with a pinch of yeast (Matthew 13:33), about a merchant who sold everything for one pearl of great value (Matthew 13:44), and about a man who sold all that he had to buy a field in which he had stumbled across a treasure (Matthew 13:45). The yeast, the pearl, and the treasure might all be understood in the Lord's Prayer. As it appears in Matthew's gospel, this prayer consists of an address to the Father and six brief petitions. And yet, nothing in all Christian piety and spirituality can compare to it. Like the yeast in the parable it can permeate an entire life. Like the wonderful pearl, it is to be greatly valued. And like the treasure in the field it is worth whatever it costs to make it our own.

### Hands Together through Prayer

Leader – Most of us are very familiar with this prayer which Jesus taught his disciples when they asked him how they should pray (Matthew 6:9). With the above thoughts of comparison to the yeast, the pearl, and the treasure, invite the participants to join hands and hearts as the group prays together the Lord's Prayer. If there is a concern that someone in the group might not be familiar with the words of this prayer, you might want to have copies available.

It is not wrong to call this prayer which we prayed together *The Lord's Prayer*. However, when we call it that, we must also realize that strictly speaking it is the disciple's

prayer. John 17 records The Lord's Prayer for it is Jesus' own personal prayer prayed in the hearing of his closet followers. When we examine its contents, we are truly walking on holy ground, like Moses before the burning bush. We should read and study it with a special measure of reverence.

The first part of the prayer (verses 1-8) refers to Christ Himself. Conscious that the appointed time for the fulfillment of His calling has come, He prays that God may so honor him in becoming the bearer of life to all people that by him God may be honored.

The second part of the prayer (verses 9-19) is for his present disciples. He intercedes on their behalf for God's preservation of them. Jesus prays not for their removal from the evil of the world but for their preservation in the midst of this evil. As Christ has been God's missionary, his consecration of himself is in view of his disciple's consecration of themselves as missionaries.

The third part of the prayer (verses 20-26) is for his future disciples (you and me). This is such a moving and beautiful prayer that I have asked (*someone to be asked ahead of time*) to read this part of the prayer out loud. (Note to Leader: be sure and ask someone ahead of time to be prepared to read this portion of John 17). How awesome that Jesus asked God to give us the same love as His Father gave to Him!

### **Hands Together through Prayer**

Let us pray individually and silently, prayers of praise and thanksgiving for God's great love for us. (Note to Leader: make sure that you give adequate time for this silent prayer. It often takes a few moments to quiet our minds and thoughts in order to reach a prayerful state. You might even want to play some quiet, reflective music to help create this mood and setting. Five minutes would not be too long for an exercise of this nature!)

As we continue our study of prayer, there is a powerful, one sentence prayer in I Chronicles 4:9. This is the prayer of Jabez:

*"Oh, that you would bless me indeed and enlarge my territory, that your hand be with me and keep me from evil that I may not cause pain."*

"Oh, that you would bless me indeed" is our prayer to be blessed that we may bless others. "Enlarge my territory" is our prayer for God to expand our opportunities and our impact in such a way that we can touch more lives for God's glory. In other words, "let me do more for your glory, God."

"That your hand be with me" is our prayer for God's strength to accomplish His will in our lives. Ask everyday for the Father's touch. "And keep me from evil that I may not cause pain" is the final petition. Like Jabez, we should plead to be kept from the powerful pull of what feels right but is wrong. In our society today we (especially our youth) are daily tempted to do what feels good but is not good.

In his book, *The Prayer of Jabez*, Bruce Wilkinson expounds on each petition of Jabez's prayer. This is a great book to have in your home. Many people have found that by praying the prayer of Jabez each day their lives have been greatly enriched spiritually.

### **Hands Together through Prayer**

With your neighbor or a partner, pray for God's touch in your life.

When I think of the hands of Cumberland Presbyterian Women joined through prayer, I am reminded of the fingers we have on each hand and how they can be used in our prayer life. Hold up your hand.

- 1) *Your thumb is nearest you.* So begin your prayer by praying for those closest to you. They are the easiest to remember. To pray for our loved ones is, as C.S. Lewis once said, “a sweet duty.”
- 2) *The next finger is the pointing finger.* Prayer for those who teach, instruct and heal. This includes teachers, doctors, and ministers. They need support and wisdom in pointing in the right direction. Keep them in your prayers.
- 3) *The next finger is the tallest finger.* It reminds us of our leaders. Prayer for the President of our country, leaders in local government, business, industry, and administrators. These people shape our nation and guide public opinions. They need God’s guidance.
- 4) *The fourth finger is our ring finger.* Surprising to many is the fact that this is our weakest finger; as any piano teacher will testify. It should remind us to pray for those who are weak, in trouble or in pain. They need your prayers every day and night. You cannot pray too much for them.
- 5) *And lastly comes our little finger;* the smallest of all which is where we should place ourselves in relation to God and to others. As the Bible says, “The least shall be the greatest among you.” Your pinkie should remind you to pray for yourself. By the time you have prayed for the other four groups, your own needs will be put into proper perspective and you will be able to pray for yourself more effectively

(Note to leader: Some people are visual learners so you might want to make a drawing of a hand and label each finger and prayer petition. The author unknown of this prayer method is unknown.)

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we come before your throne of grace to thank you for the privilege of prayer – a time to spend with you, to praise you, to worship you and to ask for forgiveness for the many times we fail to be the person you would have us to be. We thank you for your great love for us even though we are unworthy. We ask you to touch us in such a way that others will see your love reflected in our lives. We offer our prayers to you in the name of Your Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

**Virginia Edwards** is a member of Dyersburg Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Dyersburg, TN. She and her husband Gerald have two children and four grandchildren. She retired from public school as a librarian and began her second career as Director of Christian Education at the Dyersburg Church where she was instrumental in establishing the Logos Ministry for children and youth over 25 years ago. She retired from that second career in 1995 and has kept busy since then serving in the church and nurturing her family members and friends.