

The first series I preached as minister in 2009 was entitled – *The Potential of a Praying Church*. It was based on the Lord Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew 6.5-15.

Six and a half years on, we are returning to that ground with a short morning series. I encourage you to listen online if you miss a Sunday. Back in 2009 one of our Elders, preaching in the series, prayed at the end of his sermon: **'Lord, make us a praying people, make us a praying church.'** These words and that prayer have always remained with me. I often pray that prayer walking the dog up on the Braid Hills. Looking out from the hill at night over the city I see how small and vulnerable we are and how much we need the Lord.

Looking back over the years we should acknowledge where the Lord has answered that prayer. As a church family, prayer is important and people are committed to pray, expressing our dependence on the Lord for all things. Prayer in our Sunday services, Prayer Focus before our Sunday services and Central Focus once a month on Thursdays, prayer for one another in our small groups, prayer in our homes and personal prayer are all equally important. Six and a half years on we need to keep on encouraging one another in that commitment. The Bible gives many reasons why we should pray as a church. Let me highlight three.

Prayer expresses our dependence on the Lord

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus teaches his disciples an important lesson in discipleship. As they engage in his mission in the world, without the Lord they are helpless. They must depend on Him. And the expression of dependence is prayer, a confession of our inability, and the Lord's ability (*Mark 9.28-29*). Without the Lord we are helpless. If people are going to be converted we need to pray: 'Lord Jesus, we cannot convert people. You can. Please will you do it.' If people are to grow as disciples we need to pray: 'Lord Jesus, help us to grow into committed and effective disciples.' If we are to stay united as a church, keep focused on what really matters, find a long term home, we need to pray: 'Lord Jesus, keep us united, lead us forward with vision.' Prayer expresses our dependence on the Lord.

Prayer acknowledges that spiritual attack is real

In his first letter, Peter writes: 'Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith...' (*1 Peter 5.8-9a*) Lions are good hunters. You only know they're there when they've pounced! We need to live as a church with a daily awareness that the devil is prowling around.

When we pray we not only acknowledge that spiritual attack is real, we pray to a God who is more powerful than the devil. We pray that He would protect us. We pray that his Kingdom would advance even when opposition is real and tough. Of all the spiritual weapons at our disposal, prayer is our number one offensive weapon (*Ephesians 6.18*).

Prayer is our family language

Prayer for a Christian and for a Christian church is family language. Prayer is how we talk to God saying the things to Him we need to say: 'Thank you', 'I love you', 'Praise your name', 'Help me', 'I need you.'

All of these and many more reasons are reasons to keep praying: **'Lord, make us a praying people, make us a praying church.'**