



CCNL prayer prompt May 2021

Together in prayer...

It just seems logical to talk about prayer this month as CCNL will host the annual Citywide prayer breakfast on Thursday May 20, at 7:30 a.m. - this year virtually, as well as encouraging a day of prayer. We would be delighted if you would join us and invite others to also join in.

For more details and to register, click here. [Click Here to Register Now](#)

The prayer breakfast began in 1996 to unite the Christian community together in prayer for the city of London and to foster growth in our common Christian faith. Over the years, thousands of Londoners from a variety of ages, cultures, denominations, positions and racial backgrounds have participated in this event.

And each year, this verse from Jeremiah 29:7 is referenced at the breakfast. *"And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare."*

Here's a bit more of the back story on verse. In the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, we read about a very difficult time in Israel's history. Many were deported from Jerusalem to Babylon by their conquerors to weaken the power of their nation. Separated from their families, distressed, angry, and upset that their lives were in such upheaval, many were grumbling, asking "Why us?" and were longing for things to return to how they used to be. Hmmm... maybe we can relate to that a wee bit over the past year's disruptions, especially in recent weeks. Jeremiah, a not so

popular prophet of the time, sent them a letter strongly exhorting the exiled Israelites to make the effort to make themselves at home in Babylon and to work and pray for the prosperity and welfare of the city. Those words, peace and prosperity, may carry different meanings for some of us in today's common usage - but the word Jeremiah used in the original text was "shalom". Eugene Peterson, in his book on Jeremiah, 'Run with the Horses' describes that word used more broadly: **"Shalom means wholeness, the dynamic, vibrating health of a society that pulses with divinely directed purpose and surges with life-transforming love."** Wow - that is a big ask of them in a difficult time!

That is why we come together as Christ-followers, to seek that kind of 'shalom' for our city of London, and for all people who live here. At the breakfast, we specifically pray for the following: for government leaders and decision-makers at all levels; for those who are vulnerable due to illness, aging, poverty, abuse, oppression, addictions, loss of employment; for those who care for us in health care, social services, education, retail - so many that we now value as "essential workers"; for those owners of businesses - large, small, and in-between - who provide much needed employment, investment, innovation and services; for newcomers, exiles and refugees looking for safety, hope, and new beginnings; for churches, ministry leaders, and countless volunteers who offer spiritual, emotional, and physical help when needed. The list is long and could be much longer - bringing them all in prayer to God as one way to bless them and to bless our city through them.

Well known author and activist Shane Claiborne is our speaker at this year's prayer breakfast. In his book called "Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals", he explains the need for this kind of communal prayer: *"No doubt we can pray to God by ourselves....there is something beautiful about a God who is personal, who talks face to face with Moses, wrestles with Jacob and becomes fully human in JesusPersonal and/or devotional prayer and communal prayer are not at odds with each other. In fact they must go together. Just as God is communal, he is also deeply personal and intimate. If we see prayer as only a private affair, we miss out. To talk with God is to get caught up in conversation with brothers and sisters we didn't even know we had. There is something to this idea that "when two or three gather together in my name, I will be with you."....there is a reason the Lord's prayer begins with "our" Father, asking for "our" daily bread....it is not enough to pray for "my" daily bread alone."*

From the opening pages of the Bible to the very end, God shares his desire and intent to be in relationship with us, His creation and for us to be in community with others. Let's ponder together with God this awesome privilege of prayer. We are generously invited to do so by a holy, all knowing, all powerful, always present and available God who loves us so much.

We pray these things this month :

Thank you God, that you are always listening to us - simply amazing! You listen to the words we say, and the words we don't say, to the good and to the bad, to the things we understand and to the many things we do not understand. Jeremiah 29:12 says *"When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen."* You wait with us like loving parents wait and listen to their children pour out their hearts.

There are no magic words, formulas, or right ways to impress or fool you, God - we know that, yet we still try at times. It is easy for us to fall into using very literary, extravagant "Christian" language that for some can subtly feel like performing or going to meet with the Queen. People new to faith express that they are often intimidated by praying out loud with others because they think they do not yet have "the right fancy words". Graciously, you accept each and every word spoken to you - simple and extravagant. Sometimes however, we may find that we need to use the words of others, whether it is in liturgies, poetry, or written prayers, as we cannot seem to find the words to express our thoughts or concerns, or maybe when our spirits are tired or our hearts may be dry. The Spirit within us can pray for us and with us when we are overcome and confused. We can always come boldly in Jesus' name. Maybe the habits of learned prayers provide good discipline and framework as healthy reminders that areas of our life need addressing, like prayers of reflection and sincere confession to you: *"We have sinned against you by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves."* We can also pray scripture, your own inspired words, back to you and speak promises you have made to us as affirmations. The Psalms are so full of very raw and honest prayers to you - some spoken in times of grief, failure, and anger - as well those spoken in times of joy when words of exuberance and delight are often as repetitive as we can be in those moments! Or perhaps, there are just many times, as author Anne Lamott says, almost all our prayers can be summed up in these three very simple words: help.... thanks....wow.

Thank you too God that we can pray anytime, in the moment, wherever we are....in the middle of the night, in dark lonely spaces, in beautiful cathedrals or in dirty alleys. While sitting at a stop light or while waiting in grocery store lines. In our own backyard or all over the world. No technology needed and accessibility is not an issue. Silently, in barely a whisper, haltingly through tears, spoken out loud, written in a journal, or shouted at the top of our lungs, we offer prayers like these : *"Help me God, I don't know what to say next or how to respond."* *"Are you really there, are you even listening?"* *"Ohhhh, what a breathtaking sunrise you created!"* *"Please God, please God - I'm really scared right now."* *"I don't know who's in that ambulance that just went by or where it is going, but just be with them God and paramedics in these moments."* *"How could that shooting have happened? I don't know what to even ask you God in this mess."* In so

many ways, throughout each and every day, you nudge us to turn to you God, as 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says *"to pray continually."* May we be more responsive to your leading and aware of your presence in our dailies. Make us always mindful to set aside time to just be still and intentional in prayer with you, putting aside the busyness and demands of each new day - that looks different for each of us in differing seasons of our lives.

How do we even begin to thank you for the many, many answered prayers every day? Sometimes, hopefully we pause to acknowledge and be grateful for how you are at work in our lives. We don't always see how you answer. At other times, we admittedly wonder why you seem to not be answering our prayers - or it feels like you are just silent. We honestly can treat you like Santa Claus or a doting benefactor with a "gift list" or "to-do" list of what we want - and we want it right now! Forgive us. Many of us wrestle with this constant tension between two spiritual truths: *"Your will be done"* and *"You do not have, because you do not ask."* It is a difficult tension - you are very patient with us in that struggle. We also discover that, in our experience of life, we are often end up grateful that the "something" we so passionately asked for did not happen..... as well surprised by the learning that may emerge from the difficulties that we desperately wanted to avoid or stop. Help both our heads and our hearts to remember that not only do you listen to us, but you will always respond - maybe not always with an immediate resounding yes, nor a definite no, and all the continuum of possibilities in-between. And fairly often, not within our timeline - we may need to learn to wait.

This anonymous poem is a good reminder of this great mystery of how you answer our prayers:

*I asked God for strength that I might achieve;
I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for help that I might do greater things;
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.
I asked for riches that I might be happy;
I was given poverty that I might be wise.
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;
I was given weakness that I might feel need of God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
I among all people am most richly blessed!*

God, we desire to grow deeper in our understanding of your will, and in our knowledge that much happens in response to our prayers that we may never know about. Please grow our

trust in your sovereignty, even when it is painful. You are God - we are not - and we are glad of that as you are writing a bigger story than we can ever imagine. Hindsight sometimes takes a very long time to recognize, at least on this side of heaven. It is so easy for us to quote 1 Peter 5:7 *"Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you"* and much, much harder to live it out, even though it is true, confident in your deep love. Toronto author Jen Pollock Michel made an interesting comment in a recent blog post about God's character from the book of Numbers 23:19: *"God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?" I thought about this as the confidence that we have in prayer. Every time we pray, we know that God can be held to his word."*

God, as we pray, help us be willing to become part of your answer to our prayers. Shane Claiborne uses the example of when we ask God to move mountains, you God, sometimes tell us to go pick up a shovel. It is an amazing invitation to participate with you in accomplishing your purposes in this world. As people who regularly use this prayer prompt each month, and/or who take part in the prayer breakfast, and/or who pray with a group of fellow Christians, and of course who also pray privately, remind us that each one of us has a sacred role to play in bringing evidence of your Kingdom here on earth in London Ontario. How exciting!

Finally AMEN....an amen is not a "all done, so long, bye for now, thanks for the chat". It is a solemn recognition from us to you God, of **"So be it!"**, having brought this to you and placed our requests in your hands, we confirm that you hear us, that we trust in you, that we are willing to wait and that we are not alone in living this life. **AMEN**

In summary, please pray this month:

- For God to enable each of us to do our part to "work for the peace and prosperity" of London.
- For God to use Shane Claiborne's message at the Prayer Breakfast to speak to each one who attends.
- For blessing on the people of London - leaders, workers, vulnerable, and many more - pick one daily.
- For deep gratitude for and awareness of God's attentive ear - He listens to us.
- For growth in our prayer life, individually or with others, freedom from self-consciousness about how we pray and growth in our relationship with God.
- For patience/endurance when it may seem that God is not answering as we wish, trusting His deep commitment to us.
- For faith to experience God's very real presence with us as we seek Him in prayer.

- For ears to hear what God might be saying to us as we pray and a responsive heart to act in obedience to Him.