

Prayer & Alpha Seminar – Chepstow Equip & Refresh – 24 April 2010

Prayer is not something that we arrived in this world knowing how to do.

Like everything else, it's something we have to learn. I think prayer puts us on a learning curve... and that is a process that will continue all the days of our lives.

I came across some early learning experiences of prayer and they include the following:

- The Sunday school teacher who asked, "Now Johnny tell me honestly, do you say prayers before eating?" "No sir", little Johnny replied "I don't have to; my mum is a good cook."
That's a very practical early expression of prayer.
- A little boy was overheard praying, "Lord, if you can't make me a better boy, don't worry about it, I'm having a really good time like I am."

When you run Alpha regularly, you realise that there are some bigger boys praying this one too....

The notes for this seminar are on page 3 of the Track 2 Delegate Notes in your packs and there is room for your own notes.

The aim concerning prayer and "Prayer and Alpha" is to develop dynamic and effective prayer.

Another way of putting that would be to see the development of prayer that works, of prayer that makes a tangible difference.

So far as the Alpha course is concerned, Alpha is integrated into local church life. There are some exceptions to that, but by and large, most of us are probably coming from an Alpha course that is a part of a local church routine. If that is the case, then I would say, "Prayer for Alpha" is therefore part of the prayer life of the local church. Along with prayer for other activities relating to the life of the church...it's services, pastoral life, social action..... whatever all those areas are.

The point here is, that "Prayer for Alpha" ought to be wider than just those people who are directly involved with the Alpha course.

Yes we hope that the leaders and the helpers of the course pray for the Alpha Course, but we also hope that the wider prayer of the church with which that course is connected is also under girding it.

Prayer is described in the Bible at all sorts of different levels and I want to look at two examples of that.

1. The first is from Genesis 25. It's from the life of Isaac and Rebekah.

This is a very poignant example of **personal need driven prayer**.

Genesis 25:21 Isaac's prayer to the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was barren. .

We all know that world history was turning on the answer to this prayer.

But at the level of Isaac and Rebekah, this is a domestic issue, it's a personal issue, a painful issue affecting their lives and Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife and the Lord answered his prayer and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.

So that is prayer, if you like, at the domestic level of prayer.

2. At the other end of the spectrum (if I can put it like that) we see prayer described in the Bible that can actually impact on the life of a nation.

You see an example of that in 2 Chronicles 7, where the Lord is recorded as speaking to Solomon on the great day when the temple has been opened and they had been having wonderful celebrations.

In other words it's one of the highest points in the history of the people of God in the Old Testament. God is foreseeing what would come in the future and He is recorded as having spoken these words to Solomon in v13:

"When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land, or send a plague among my people....."

Other references in the Old Testament show that that is a reference to if a time comes in the future, when my people have back-slidden, rejected me, rebelled against me and therefore things are not going well for them in their society in the land, then here is God's prescription for such a circumstance in v14:

"...IF my people, who are called by my name, WILL HUMBLE themselves and pray AND SEEK my face AND TURN from their wicked ways, THEN WILL I HEAR from heaven AND WILL FORGIVE their sins AND WILL HEAL their land." Here we have a description of prayer being one of the requirements of God to come into the circumstance described. The answer to that prayer included a healing of a nation, a healing of the land, as it's put in these verses.

Obviously these are hugely different levels of prayer and prayer at all the other levels in-between is also described as we go through the pages of the Bible.

Therefore, we want to encourage prayer at every level in the context of Alpha.

Alpha is usually organised into small groups and most Alpha's as they progress, as they develop, as they grow in size, are organised in this way.

The only people who will directly know the individuals on the course are the small group leaders and the small group helpers. They are ideally placed to pray for the individual needs, the individual situations, the individual lives, the individual people that are in their groups. They are the ones who will know what the issues are, will know where people are struggling, will know how people are doing. And we would encourage the leaders and the helpers of the groups to be praying for their members..... frequently, regularly, hopefully even daily.

Then in a wider level of prayer, if you are running a large course in one venue (as the HTB Alpha course is run) then the whole team can gather to pray before the evening starts. Part of what they do is to pray and to worship together, not just the individual small group leaders and helpers, but the combined leadership team of that Alpha Course.

Be the course a large or a small one, what we pray is determined by where we are on the Alpha course. If it's at the beginning of the course we would probably pray for the first impression of the people as they arrive. I heard of a couple who went to the HTB course....they sat outside the church and decided they would wait and see what the people who were walking into the Alpha course looked liketo see if they looked 'normal'. The inference being if they looked 'abnormal' this couple were going to leave. Well luckily they obviously thought they looked normal and they joined the Alpha course and they've been committed members of that church for years now, as a result.

But first impressions are so important. There are spiritual dynamics at work here.

Perhaps the course is reaching a stage where we are coming up to the weekend away, about the person and the work of the Holy Spirit. Again, people can be quite challenged by the idea of going away for a weekend and maybe have a completely wrong idea of what the weekend would be like. We want to pray about that.

Pray that people will get to the weekend, pray that they will have safety of travel, pray that they will be blessed on the weekend, that they will be converted and filled with the Holy Spirit on the weekend.

We would want to do that jointly, collectively as the team.

Or maybe we are coming to the end of the course and it's coming toward the celebration supper when the people who have been on the course bring their friends. We want to pray for that together because we're trying to sow into the Alpha course through prayer.

We are trying to have better, stronger, more fruitful Alpha courses through prayer.

And praying and worshiping will make a difference there and then.....wherever the Alpha course is going to be taking place later that night.

We see a link between praying and the results, the answers to prayers.

We believe that that link exists.

Then the third level of prayer I've already touched upon, which is the prayer life of the local church.

In Chepstow we run Alpha as Churches Together and "Prayer for Alpha" is regularly included in the individual church prayer groups and also at a monthly Dynamic Prayer meeting open to all our churches. This will, of course, include people who are not directly involved with the Alpha course, but they can be involved in it, through their praying. They are investing in the course through their prayers. So in that sense, actually they are directly involved in it.

But another aspect of this of course, is that some of the leaders and helpers come along to the prayer meetings too. That is such a blessing for both them and the courses they are involved with.

So you see the people involved at both ends.....as it were. Praying for the courses and then, hopefully being the answer, or part of the answer, to their own prayers on the actual course. And we want these prayer meetings to be inclusive and we want "Prayer for Alpha" to be inclusive, not just those directly involved in it, but also the wider membership of the church praying for the Alpha courses.

Beyond that, there are bigger joint church prayer meetings in the Alpha context.

For the last several years we've had the national Alpha initiative in September each year. When it started in 1998 it was obvious that not everyone could go to HTB....(there would not have been room anyway) so a common agenda was made available to anyone wanting to run a prayer meeting anywhere around the country and in that way, we are having effectively, a national prayer meeting, regionally based. And that has developed. The first year, there were about 150 prayer meetings. In the fourth year there were 640 around the country all praying for the Alpha Initiative.....and it grows every year.

All these different levels of prayer, hopefully, are being brought to bear, to try and make these courses more fruitful, more effective.

Why?

Simply because the underlying, driving motivation, is to see men and women becoming converted and filled with the Holy Spirit and being created as disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And the Alpha course is after all, just a tool, just a vehicle. While God seems to be blessing it, we want to be praying into it as much as we possibly can. So that it is as effective and as fruitful as it can be.

Earlier I mentioned corporate prayer..... praying together.

Obviously we would want to encourage personal prayer.

I've talked about the individual leaders and helpers praying personally for people in their groups.

I don't think you could mount anything that is very effective in the corporate arena of prayer, if people are NOT effective at praying personally.

So the foundational level of prayer is personal prayer.

Praying together as a church in many of our traditions, has become the more neglected side of prayer.

I don't think you can find a Christian who thinks prayer is a bad idea.

But I do think you can find quite a lot of Christians (and quite a lot of churches too) who to some extent have lost sight of the importance of praying together.

I came across this article by George Verwer, who is the director of Operation Mobilisation, in this article he said: "I have ministered in thousands of churches over the past 22 years in Europe, North America and around the world. And I have never ceased to be amazed at the neglect of true, heart-felt corporate prayer."

It is such an important activity. It's something that has been there, right back at the beginning and it seems that for many of us at least, and in many of our churches, we were robbed somewhere along the way down the line and we lost touch with some of our roots.

One of the things we want to say about it in terms of the advantages it brings, is that there is an increase in strength in our praying, as we come together to pray, as we unite together to pray. We really don't have to look any further than Matthew 18:v20 for a reason for that.... because in that verse, Jesus says, "*for where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.*"

There are different ways that we can come together in the name of Jesus.

One of the ways that we can obviously come together in His name, is to pray and to worship together. In that context, even down to the minimum level of two people, we have the words and the promise of Jesus "there I am with you."

Jesus is with us by his Holy Spirit when we come together in his name.

Obviously, if Jesus is with us, that is going to increase the effectiveness, the strength, if you like, of our praying.

And if Jesus is with us, how can that be boring?

If I said "I want you to say the first word that comes into your mind after I say Prayer Meeting"
..... I think most people would say boring.

And that is the reputation of the poor old prayer meeting.

That is a travesty; it's a tragedy... because the effect of that, is that we stop doing it.

If it is boring when we pray together, then I think what we have to address is, 'Are we doing it right?'

Because the last thing it should be is boring.....

because if we've come together then Jesus is there in our midst.....

because that is the increase in strength as we come together.....

The second advantage is "Unity".

Unity in a common cause, for example, we can unite around a church situation, a church context, we can unite around wanting to have our Alpha courses effective and as fruitful and as flourishing as they can be. We can have unity about that. Unity isn't such a great puzzle or mystery.

As we come together to pray, what we are actually seeking is what we call vertical unity, we are trying to bring ourselves into alignment with what is on His will, His agenda and in His heart for us as His local church, His people.

Once we see it like that, unity isn't very difficult. Psalm 133 tells us what God thinks about unity.....v3b
...*"for there God bestows His blessing....."* Unity is very, very important to this activity.

Imagine coming to a prayer meeting and somebody is leading/facilitating the meeting and they say something like this.

"Now, I'd like everybody who thinks that the Alpha course should be bigger to get on that side of the room, and I'd like everyone who thinks the Alpha course should be smaller, to get on that side of the room and now I'd like you to pray".

It's a contradiction of terms!

But we can have unity because what is on God's heart, what's on God's agenda, what's important to God is actually all recorded for us in The Bible.

He is passionate, for example, about the name of his Son being glorified.

He is passionate about the church of Jesus Christ

He is passionate about the lost..... it's all there for us.

It isn't a great mystery.....actually, unity is something that is very powerful as expressed in the context of a prayer meeting.

One of the things that I love about praying together is when we come into the prayer meeting room, we can lay down at the door, our personal preoccupations, agendas and issues.

And for a period of time we can unite with a group of other people, and focus on a corporate agenda, an agenda that is relevant to us all.

That agenda relates to the life of our local church, it may take us to world issues, because we are not immune to or from world issues..... they are relevant to us all.

I think it's fair to say that the extraordinary thing is, after doing that for a set period of time, when we go out of the room, whatever we left at the door on the way in, has assumed, some how, a different perspective.

When we go out, some of the mountains that we left outside of the door seemed to have turned into molehills during the time of praying together.

It seems to be beneficial to come together and focus on a corporate agenda for a while.

And it's biblical – this is the advantage of corporate prayer.

Acts 1:v14, the context of this is after Jesus had told them to go into the city of Jerusalem and to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit. After Jesus' ascension, we're told that they did go back to the city and we are told this in verse 14, *"they all joined together constantly in prayer"*.

So right from the very start, right from the earliest days, they had this practice of praying together.

They gave a priority to this activity.

That is quite clear as you read through the pages of the Acts of the Apostles and whilst we are not told what they were praying for, having been given the promise of Jesus that you are going to receive the Holy Spirit it seems that one of the main things that they must have been praying for.... is for that promise to be fulfilled.

Then we all know what transpired on the day of Pentecost.

And how the day of Pentecost was an ongoing... 24 hour... corporate... prayer meeting. They all joined together constantly in prayer. And on the day of Pentecost, as we know, God poured out his Holy Spirit and 3,000 people were converted in one day. There was a prayer root to all that activity. So it is Biblical.

The final advantage is pragmatic.... we believe that it works. Why should, or would, you commit to any activity if you don't believe that it makes any difference or that it does any good?

2 years ago in August 2008, here in Chepstow, we decided to run a 24-7 Prayer Room prior to the Alpha Initiative.....168 hours of continuous prayer for the Alpha courses that autumn which ended with a "Prayer & Praise" event, the national prayer event I spoke of earlier.

It was the first time that I had organised anything to do with prayer. I had spoken to a friend in my church who had organised similar events before and she had said conversationally that at some point in the set up phase..... God would show up!

I remember nodding my head sagely whilst inside I was thinking "what do you mean, God shows up..... what has it got to do with Him?....."

All I can say is that He is very forgiving and He did indeed "show up".....and gave us a prophecy too!

So..... was there an effect on our courses that autumn? Very definitely.....more people came to the Invitation Supper, more signed up to do the course, more of them came to faith and that faith was a deeper understanding than we had experienced before with real ongoing discipleship.

Last autumn we ran another 24-7 Prayer Room in a different venue.....it was very different to the previous year... new challengespersonal and corporate.....and again the Lord gave us a prophecy.

One thing I can guarantee is that you will be out of your comfort zones but I can also guarantee that if you are prepared to risk getting close to Him.... God will take you on a life changing journey.

Those are some of the advantages we see of praying together.

Here are some of the aims.

I would say the first aim is this; we're seeking, when we come together to pray and to worship together, we're seeking to touch the heart of God.

Looking at the very heart of this activity of praying together..... it's relational.

What we are seeking to do in the corporate context is to be in the ongoing process of the relationship that we have with this God who knows us, and who loves us and who made us and all the rest of it.

And in the context of that relationship it's quite right, it's quite correct to bring our need before Him.

But first and foremost, we are trying to come together to seek, to touch the heart of God.

To seek to be a blessing to Him. To seek to please God, if I can put it like that.

We have to leave Him to judge if we succeed or not, but at least that can be our aim.

And if that is our aim, in the context of corporate praying, that immediately brings you face to face with the central role of worship.

Because worship, is an immensely powerful activity in its own right.

Worship, for me, is like light shining in the darkness or light being released into the darkness anyway.

I can't think of any sort of any kind of demonic presence who would enjoy being anywhere near a group of Christians worshipping God.

Worship and prayer together, seeking to touch the heart of God, seeking to worship God, seeking to express our love to God first and foremost, is, I would say, the primary aim of corporate prayer.

The second aim is more pragmatic.

It's to promote change.

Culminating, going back to the words I read from 2 Chronicles 7:v14 culminating "in a healing of the land."

I don't know what your definition of revival is but I think if we experienced living in a land that had been healed by God we would know what the definition of Revival is or was.

That's the second aim, we want to see change, and we want to see what I was describing earlier as dynamic and effective prayer. Prayer that brings changes, prayer that makes a difference.

Up to and including ultimately, a healing of this nation, a healing of our society.

The third aim is what we call prayer based activity.

Referring to that verse in Acts 1 where we are told "*they all joined together constantly in prayer*".

The word ALL means "everyone".

The point of that is, the people who were involved in praying, were therefore also involved on the day of Pentecost. It wasn't like there was a specialist prayer group, or something like that, then there was the apostles and then the rest of them.

No, they all prayed and they were all involved in the other activity and work in the life of the church.

And I think that is the pattern we should be seeking to emulate.

There doesn't seem to be an exclusion from the activity, it seems to be part of the central, main, normal life of the church, praying together and then (for example), helping to lead and to help on Alpha courses or whatever the other work of the church is.

Prayer based activity.

If we see that there is a biblical case for praying together, that biblically speaking there is a model for it, that it is an important activity in the life of the church, then it brings us face to face with the question 'How?'

I hope I don't shock anybody.....but I think that praying together should be enjoyable.

The reason I say that is, because I don't know anybody who is so sanctified yet, that they would go to a prayer meeting that was really, really boring.

They might go, but I don't know many people who would keep going, and go again. As I said earlier, why does it have to be dull and boring if this activity is taking place in the presence of Jesus Christ?

I think the type of meetings and the type of ways that we should pray together and worship together ought to be fun, for want of a better word.

Yes the issues are real... but if we have an expression of corporate prayer that nobody comes to, that seems to me to be absolutely tragic.

If this is right, and if this activity is important and central to the life of the church, beneficial to Alpha and other activity in the church then we need to be doing it.

So we need to be looking at ways that are attractive to people in our culture, in our context, that brings them into the prayer meetings

....and that can be a personal challenge to our own preferences too....we can't expect everyone else to like what we like....we have to find a way to include everyone.

The next section is looking at some of the models that we have found a help from that sense and in that perspective.

From visits to HTB over the last few years, here in Chepstow, we have embraced their Dynamic Prayer models and adapted them to our own needs and preferences.

3 of us take it in turn to put together and run the meeting and there are some printed examples of the different programmes we create on the table and available for download from our website..

The first model is the one that I guess we would be most familiar with.

It's one person praying and everyone else listening and saying Amen at the end. And that is an excellent model of prayer..... but it has limitations.

Even in a group this size, if that's the only model we ever used... if we were a prayer meeting that was meeting weekly for one hour, or something like that, then we are immediately putting a cap on how much praying can take place.

Possibly in a room this size, certainly in a larger room, you could have an issue with the person praying not being heard by everyone else in the room. Certainly you would have an issue in a group this size that you would have one person praying and by the end of the meeting a number of people would have prayed but it would have been impossible for everyone to have prayed.

The most natural progression was to move from that first model to being in a group ... and subdividing a large group into smaller groups of say three or four people.

The leader of the meeting would have identified what we are going to pray for next, and would instruct those present to please get into small groups, of three or four to pray for our vicar, our mission, our whatever it is.

Suddenly you've got the same model being used, but in smaller groups all around the room.

But it's very different, because if you are involved in such a meeting you hear prayer going up all around the room and there is a multiplication of prayer, but it is the same model.

It's just one person praying in a group of three, two other people listen and say Amen and then the second person praying and then the third person praying. So it is the same model, but far more prayer is taking place as a result.

It also deals much more effectively with the sound barrier. I guess all of us can look back at a time when we first prayed out loud and that was quite a difficult thing to do for many of us. But it's much harder to do it in front of all these people than it is to do it in front of two other people.

So that is an excellent model and you can use that model in any size of group from about 6 people upwards.

The next model is quite a radical step forward, quite a quantum leap, if you like.

In Acts 4: v24 we're told this, "*they raised their voices together in prayer to God*" and on that occasion it seems like there was just a spontaneous outburst of everybody in the room praying out loud together. I don't know if that sounds to you a bit chaotic or a bit anarchic or something like that. But I think if you stand back from that... and you think about it...all over the world, even at this moment, there are people praying to God.

That is going on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 52 weeks a year.

Millions of prayers going up to heaven.

So if, for example, in this room, we all prayed out loud together for the same thing, just raising our voices together in prayer to God. Well I don't think that causes confusion in heaven.

Heaven is already receiving millions of prayers from all around the world so a few dozen extra prayers coming up from downtown Chepstow in one moment in time is not going to blow the heavenly computers..... it's just more praying and it's how, evidently, on this occasion, they prayed.... as described for us in Acts chapter 4.

We can sing in prayer.

Many of the songs that have been written, if you think about it, they are actually praying..... Show your Power; Send your Power, songs like that.He is the Lord, you know with the chorus, send your power, they are actually interceding, they are praying.

Many of the songs that have been written are forms of prayer. It helps to point that out and say "we're going to sing this song and recognise that while we're singing it, it's praying as well."

We're singing in prayer.

Another way we can do this, is to do the model I've just described with everybody praying out loud together, but we can subdivide the room (the group) into two groups and one side can worship, while the other side is praying out loud together.

That is a great way to get started because if people feel a bit self conscious praying out loud with a load of other people (and I understand that totally if they do), then if you've got the noise of worship on one side of the room, while you begin to pray out loud on the other side of the room, it's much easier not to feel self conscious.

And then what we would do is we would switch it around.

So the side that was worshipping would pray and the side that were praying would worship and we might end that section by all worshipping together.

So literally combining singing and praying together in the same model of prayer.

The ways of praying that I have described involve quite a lot of noise but we don't think and we are not saying that this is about the noise level that we can put up.

That if we can make enough noise, that is bound to get God's attention and cause him to answer our prayer.

No, it isn't actually....and we don't believe that at all.

One of the ways we can pray together is in silence.

We believe that God listens to the prayers of our heart, not the noise that we make with our mouths and we can pray together in silence.

One of the things we emphasise in our version of Dynamic Prayer here in Chepstow is that no-one "has to" pray out loud....but those who find that it concentrates the mind are free to do so or to pray with a prayer partner if they prefer.we have learnt not to be prescriptive....we are seeking to pray what is on God's heart.... and if something comes to a person's mind, different to the prayer points on the screen, then we say go with whatever God has given you.

Interestingly, those who have taken the brave step to pray out loud, suddenly find that "someone" seems to be giving them the words to pray.....

There can be other activity in prayer meetings..... for example, interviewing people, getting somebody in who is involved in some aspect of the work of your church or maybe someone from outside of your church and then interviewing them so that we can get around them and pray for them.

The interview should be very simple, keep the talk to a minimum, we are here to pray and worship.

The first question is What's involved, because we need to hear from the person what are we addressing.

And the second question is the important one which is :-

What's the vision, then you can gather around and pray into that with them.

So occasionally have somebody in to interview them.... or use scripture in the prayer meeting . If you think about it, every time we say the Lord's Prayer together, we are quoting scripture.

There are other wonderful scriptures that we can use at different moments but always to focus our attention on Jesus.

Please don't think that you have to wait until you've got 20, 30, 50, 75 people who signed up to come to the prayer meeting.

HTB advice is to just make a start.

Advertise it and say where and when there will be a prayer and worship meeting for 1 hour. Don't think that, unless ½ the congregation is there, it's a complete failure. Don't think in those terms at all.

Jesus said when two or three are gathered together in my name.

Are two people praying for an hour better than no people praying?

The answer is a no-brainer, of course it is.

Even HTB started from the smallest beginnings; they started the current program of prayer in the life of their church with just a handful of people. Here in Chepstow we have had occasions when only the team and worship group have been there and we have had an amazing time with the Lord.....there can be 6 people or 60it doesn't matter.....what matters is to just do it....

The second thing I would say about the models is that the models just help us.

We don't think that one model impresses God as against another model.or something like that.

We think he has given us the answer to that in Joel 2:v13.

Clearly speaking to the people of God through the prophet Joel, he says this

"rend your heart and not your garments".

We can come together and have a corporate heart, a united heart, if you like.

There is no formula..... It says *"rend your heart and not your garments."*

Wouldn't we love it if we could preferably take somebody else's jacket and rip it in two and revival will break out in our church or our town or our city or our country or whatever.

It's not a technique. This is not about a technique..... it seems that what God will listen to is the rending of the heart of his people....when we seek to come to Him with what's on His heart, His agenda and His will. We're seeking to pray into existence and to pray to come to pass the things that God wants to do on the earth.

We're not here; we're not seeking to come together with our own good ideas, with our own agenda of what would sort our town out.

We are trying to rend our hearts, to cry out from the heart that God would hear the cry of the heart of his people for the things to come to pass in our town that He wants to come to pass in our town.

So....the 1 hour prayer meeting..... What do you do for 1 hour?

Actually here in Chepstow we meet for 50 minutes...

Well this is what we do... we come... we start when we say we will start... and even if there is nobody there we start on time.

We worship for 10 – 15 minutes, which seems to us to be the right thing to do to get the focus, the corporate focus on to God, then whoever is leading the meeting will give a welcome and an introduction and that will last a maximum 5 minutes and whoever is giving the introduction must resist the temptation to preach like the plague.

The Introduction is simply to focus people, maybe just to look for example at Acts 1:v14 just to remind people that before the day of Pentecost they were all joining together constantly to pray.

Out of that came the day of Pentecost, hopefully, the message that conveys is that it made a difference then, so it can make a difference now in the life of our church or whatever the context is.

Introduction, then feedback. In other words, expect to have your prayers answered!

“Do you remember last week we prayed for this, that or the other, well let me tell you what’s happened?”

Two things happen out of that. One is, God gets the glory and gets thanked. Which we think is absolutely important. Vital, because we are in an ongoing relationship a living vibrant relationship with this person who has feelings.

If He has blessed us, we ought to thank Him.

Like the ten Lepers, only one came back to Jesus praising God and to thank Jesus for the healing and Jesus was disturbed by that.

One, its good because we are in a relationship and we are trying to please and bless God and

Two, its good because as we hear what happened from last week, something in us is saying “Wow, if that happened last week, think what can happen this week” and faith is rising.

So it’s beneficial in that it is a double-whammy, if I can put it like that.

So after the Worship, Intro and feedback the remaining time we would spend praying through a variety of topics, probably about 5 different topics with a variety of models of prayer.

With worship between sometimes or even during praying, so worship is interspersed and mixed in with all of that.... and with that formula, you will be amazed how quickly the 50 or 60 minutes goes and also, how much praying you’ve done by the end of it, which is very important.

Finally I would say that, under the heading of HTB experience, what we have learnt is that our job is really very simple. It is just to follow where we are led by the Holy Spirit.

You can’t go to another church and say “what is your structure for prayer”?

Because God will have His plan for your church, BUT you can get some general ideas and that is what HTB did and in turn what we did here in Chepstow.

HTB visited another church where they had effective corporate prayer. It opened their eyes, but the leader of that church when they went to see him said, “Don’t do what we’re doing, find out what God has got for you and follow that”.

This is what Jeremy Jennings (who was the Prayer Director at HTB at the time) says happened.....

“And as we have sought to do what we’ve seen, when we’ve come to a place and we’ve thought, this is nice and we can consolidate now, it seems that somehow God sort-of speaks into that situation and says, “now why not a prayer weekend?” or something like that and all bets are off again because all we knew

was how to pray for an hour and this idea came along and I knew it was a God idea. I don't know if you can relate to what I am saying. Someone mentioned it to me and simultaneously two things happened. One was my heart sank; the other was my spirit rose. Because I knew I would have to be the one to lead it and I didn't even know if you could pray for more than an hour. But we went, we did and you can!"

Prayer weekends, prayer nights, themed meetings, prayer boat trips, Watch Night meetings on New Year's Eve.....wherever the Lord leads.....

There are other aspects of prayer relating to Alpha too.

The fifth week of the Alpha course is the talk about prayer, it is 'Why and how do I pray' and that is about personal prayer and that is good and right because new Christians have to learn about personal prayer. As for praying in small groups, as I think you have heard or will be hearing, don't do that too soon. Don't rush that. Imagine Week one..... people have dragged themselves into the Alpha course and you as the leader of the group say "Now Henry you haven't said much tonight, would you like to close us in prayer?" and Henry is not even converted yet. Well the trouble with that is, you won't see Henry again next week. But maybe after the weekend, maybe at some point that becomes appropriate and it can also be a turning point in the life of that group, but that needs careful judgement. The issues are spiritual and real. No blessing goes uncontested. It is said, and I believe that the old adage is true, Satan trembles at the sight of the weakest Saint on his or her knees. That is the good news, but the other side of that news is that he will presumably go to a great deal of time and trouble and effort to block the process of us getting onto our knees.

In terms of a vision, I would just like to lay before you the vision of the church on its knees.

This is what Jeremy Jennings says in his book of that name.

"That is not for us a picture of defeat. The church on its knees.

We are the only army that I can think of who can find victory on our knees.

I'm not saying you have to pray on your knees. I am talking about an attitude now. There is nothing wrong with praying on your knees. We associate kneeling with praying, but the picture of the church on its knees is a picture of a church which is surrendered, obedient, loving and responsive. That's a picture of a church where Jesus Christ wants his church to be. And if we have understood that, then I think we will experience the victory that he wants for us and the victory that he wants for his church and the evangelisation and impact, being the salt and the light to the society around us and all the other things that the church should be. In our experience the effects of corporate prayer are cumulative and compound. We know that it works. That it can be exciting, that it needs to be led from the front and we believe that it's one of the things that the Holy Spirit is doing at the moment, that He is stirring up prayer. To what end? To all sorts of levels of change and making a difference but up to, ultimately and finally, including a healing of the land. Beyond that, who knows what impact into the lives of other nations and all the rest of it? "

And finally.....

If you choose to move forward, out of your comfort zones and into the very real presence of God....I can guarantee that you will echo Jeremy Jennings with these thoughts:

“My heart sank; my spirit rose.....because I knew I would have to be the one to lead it.....!

In Chepstow.....we started....we have seen highs.....we have seen lows.....
we have struggled..... but we have persisted....and all I can say is:

WE went, WE did and YOU can!”