

## **Prayer & Alpha Seminar – Jeremy Jennings.**

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. That process 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 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. Here is another one. I had been teaching my three year old daughter the Lord's Prayer. For several evenings at bed time she would repeat after me the lines from the prayer. Finally she decided to go solo. I listened with pride as she carefully pronounced each word, right up until the end of the prayer. "Lead us not into temptation, she prayed, but deliver us some email. Amen." Very contemporary or High Tech version of the Lord's Prayer.

Another one was one Sunday at the service a young child was acting up during the morning worship. His parents did their best to maintain some sense of order in the pew, but were losing the battle; finally the Father picked the little fellow up and walked sternly up the aisle on his way out, just before reaching the doors out of the church, the little boy called loudly to the congregation, "Pray for me, Pray for me." Very quick witted early experience of prayer.

Finally, a little boy (it's always 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."

The notes are on page 29.

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 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 apart 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. Its services, its pastoral life, its social action, whatever all the areas of the local church are, and they should be a part of the prayer life of the local church. That should certainly should include the Alpha course. The point here is, prayer for Alpha ought to be wider than just those who are directly involved with the Alpha course. Yes we hope that the leaders and the helpers and the leader of the course pray for the Alpha Course, but we also

hope that the wider prayer of the church with which that church is connected is being brought to bear under girding that Alpha Course.

Prayer is described in the Bible at all sorts of different levels and I want to look at two examples of that. The first is from Genesis 25, if you're following. It's from the life of Isaac and Rebekah. This is a very poignant example of personal need driven prayer. Genesis 25:21 Isaac prayer to the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was barren. The Lord answered his prayer and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. I know that we all know that world history was turning on the answer to this prayer. 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.

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 speaking to Solomon the Lord is recorded as having said 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. It's like God foreseeing what would become, or what would come in the future is recorded as having spoken these words to Solomon.

'When I shut up the heaven's so that there is no rain or command locust to devour the land or send a plague among my people.'

And 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. Verse 14, 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 and that I've tried to describe. The answer to that prayer, the answer to the prayer including 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. That would include the team members, the leaders and the helpers praying individually, perhaps sometimes together, frequently, perhaps daily, for the individual members in their groups because once Alpha is organised into small groups. Most Alpha's as they progress, as they develop as they grow in size that is how they are organised. The only people who will directly know the individuals on the course is the small group leaders and the small group helpers. They are ideally situated/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, we have the opportunity on the HTB Alpha course, we gather together as the whole team before the evening starts. Part of what we do is to pray and to worship together, not just the individual leaders and helpers, but the combined leadership team of that Alpha Course. And we gather together and we worship and we pray together and what we pray is determined by where we are on the Alpha course. If it's at the beginning of the Alpha course we would probably pray for the first impression of the people as they arrive. I know a couple who came to this course, they sat outside the church, they decided they would wait and see what the people looked like, who were walking in to come onto the Alpha course to 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 this church for years now, as a result. But first impressions are so important. There are spiritual dynamics at work here and people getting there, sometimes getting people to come into a church is a miracle in itself. So we want to pray at that stage of the course for peoples first impressions as they arrive. 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 people will have safety of travel, prayer that people will be blessed on the weekend, that people 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. What I often say to the people in this room (because this is where the team meet to pray) is what you're doing here and now, i.e. praying and worshiping, will make a difference there and then i.e. up there in the church where the Alpha Meeting is going to be taking place later tonight.

So 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. That is the context of the Alpha course, whichever church that is. In our church we have two weekly prayer meetings. One on Tuesday mornings, one on Thursday evenings. Prayer for Alpha we would want to see regularly included in those meetings as apart of Alpha being one of the core activities of the church. So when we meet together to pray together

in our prayer meetings we want to make sure that we pray for that activity along with the other important activities in the life of the church. 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 is, of course, is that some of the people who are actually are directly involved in the course. Some of the leaders and helpers come along to the prayer meetings. One of the things I love to see is, on Tuesday mornings, people there who on Wednesday nights, for example, are going to be leading and helping in the small groups on our Alpha course, and they are there on Tuesday morning praying. So you see the people involved at both ends. As it were. Praying on Tuesday mornings and then, hopefully being the answer or part of the answer to their own prayers on Wednesday night. And we want these prayer meetings to be inclusive and we want prayer for Alpha to be inclusive, not those directly involved in it, but also the wider membership of the church praying for the Alpha courses.

Beyond that, joint church prayer meetings in the Alpha context. For the last several years we've had the Alpha initiative, in September each year and when it started, I think the first year was 1998, when it started, we just thought it's a national initiative, it's going to be an expression of this initiative all over the country, 'wouldn't it be great to pray about it'? Then we thought, sadly we can't get everyone to come to one place, like HTB and anyway hopefully there wouldn't be enough room for everyone, but what we can do is make one common agenda available to anyone who want 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, as I recall, I think there were about, 150 prayer meetings. Last year which was the fourth year we've done this, there were 640 prayer meetings around the country all praying for the Alpha Initiative.

All these different levels of prayer, hopefully, are being brought to bear, to try and make these course 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. So all the prayer at every level is going towards that ultimate goal. 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 effective and fruitful wherever there is an expression of Alpha, as it can be.

I want to talk to you about 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. There is a level of prayer in the church i.e. praying together, that I think, 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. I think you can find quite a lot who have lost sight of (and quite a lot of churches), to some extent, greater or less, 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 this, and '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 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 Ch18:20 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. We can come together when we come to a service, in the name of Jesus. We can come together for different meetings in the name of Jesus, but 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.

The second thing I want to say about that is, if Jesus is with us, how can that be boring? And yet the reputation of the 'prayer meeting', the poor old prayer meeting, it's PR (whoever has been doing PR for the prayer meeting for the last 50 years is, in my opinion, done a rotten, lousy, awful job).

If you say, 'I want you to say the first word that comes into your mind after I say the following words' and then you say 'Prayer Meeting!' I think everyone would say boring. 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 boring, because if we've come together then Jesus is there in our midst. So the increase in strength as we come together.

Second advantage; Unity. Unity in a common cause, for example, we can unite around in a church situation, a church context, we can unite around wanting to have our Alpha courses effective and as fruitful and as flourishing as it can be. We can have unity about that. Unity isn't such a great puzzle or mystery; I think we learnt that along the way. We now see it like this, 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. 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. '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 here. 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, and it's all here for us. It isn't a great mystery, as it were, as to how do we find this unity? 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 and our personal agendas and our personal issues. And for a period of time we can unite with a group of other people, and focus on a corporate agenda. That is an agenda that is relevant to us all. That relates to the life of our local church. That agenda may take us to world issues, because we are not immune to from world issues, but it's relevant to us all. I think it's fair to say the extraordinary things is, after doing that for a set period of time, whatever that is, when we go out of the room, whatever they were, that we left at the door on the way in, they have assumed, some how, a different perspective. They've come into a better perspective. It seems to be beneficial to come together and focus on a corporate agenda for a while. 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's biblical – this is the advantages of corporate prayer. Act 1:14, the context of this is after Jesus had told them to go into the city Jerusalem and to wait 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 3000 people were converted in one day. There was a prayer root to all that activity. So it is Biblical.

Finally, the final advantage is pragmatic, we believe that it works. Why should we commit to any activity if you don't believe that it makes any difference or that it does any good? We have some friends Western Supermare. The wife

of a vicar there brought a team to one of our prayer weekends. We go away as a church for an annual prayer weekend in February. She brought about 7 people with her from this church in Western Supermare. After that weekend she sent me this message.

“After the weekend we couldn’t wait to get along to the prayer meeting again, which has had an average attendance of between 7 and 10 people. However, this week there were 21. We have put a lot of effort into running the past few Alpha Courses really well. But have seen very little come of it by way of new Christians being born. However the prayer meetings which began 9 months ago, have provided an opportunity for more united, consistent prayer for Alpha and we are now seeing on this present Alpha Course a significant change. Nearly every one of the 24 people on the course are not Christians and there is an atmosphere of genuine, openness to the Gospel. We are aware of God being more present in a way that he has not been before and very importantly, He seems to be peeling off some of the things in our own lives that hinder us from being effective communicators of the Gospel.”

Now in her mind, the extra effort, investment and energy that they have put as a church into praying together is producing fruit on their Alpha course. She believes that is why they are seeing the change and the improvement on their Alpha Course.

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.

I’ve been responsible for the corporate prayer here for about 12 years now and somewhere along the line it occurred to me that if we tried to think of all the gaps, the potential gaps in the life of this church, and I made a list of the gaps. I might have a list of 10 gaps or 100 gaps or 1000 gaps or 10,000 gaps but no matter how long the list was, surely I would overlook some gaps that are potential gaps in the life of this church. So I saw at the very heart of this activity, 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. If that is our aim. I want to say in the context of corporate praying, that immediately brings you face to face with the central role of worship. I would much rather have a name for prayer meetings that conveyed a sense of prayer and worship meetings. Because worship, is an immensely powerful activity in its own right. Worship, it seems to 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 of course is more pragmatic. It's to promote change. Culminating, going back to the words of the verses I read from 2 Chronicles 7:14, culminating in a healing of the land. I don't know what your definition of revival is but I think if we experience living in a land that had been healed by God we would know what the definition of Revival is or was. Hands up anybody who wants to live in a land that has been healed by God. It's not a trick question. 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'. I looked up the word all, it means 'everyone'. The point of that is, the people who were involved in praying, were therefore also involved on the day of Pentecost. Peter was amongst all, in terms of verse 14. Peter was involved on the day of Pentecost. It wasn't like there was a specialist prayer group, or something's like that, then there was the apostles and 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. I think that is the pattern we should be seeking to emulate. There are seasons, sometimes we have more time for prayer, and perhaps we are a retired person or something like that. That is wonderful, pray more. We can pray more if we have such an opportunity, but there doesn't seem to be an exclusion, as it were, from the activity, it seems to be part of the central main normal life of the church, is 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?' Because I want to say this and I hope I don't shock anybody. I think praying together should be enjoyable. The reason I say that is, 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 than 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.

So the next section is looking at some of the models that we have found a help from that sense and in that perspective. The first model is the one that I guess we would be most familiar with. Its 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 meetings that was meeting weekly for one hour, or something like that, then we immediately are 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 possible to be 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 probably would have been impossible for everyone to have prayed. So we found early on that we had to explore and look for some different models of praying together and the most natural progression, in our experience, was to move from that first model, that I have just described to being in a group (however large, anything from 10 people upwards or 6 or 8) and subdividing the larger group into smaller groups, groups of say three or four people. Then someone would have identified, before we sub-divide like that, the leader of the meeting would have identified what we are going to pray for next, and would you please get into small groups, groups of three or four (or thereabouts) and 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. 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 and if it is 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 deals much more effectively with what I call the sound barrier. I guess all of us can look back at a time when we first prayed out loud and that was quiet a difficult thing to do for many of us. 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: 24 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 'does that sound 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 coming up to heaven. So if, for example, in this room, we all prayed out loud together, I'm not saying someone should say now think of something to pray for because the whole point about this is unity. It's been determined what we're praying for and then we just raise our voices together in prayer to God. Well I don't think that causes confusion in heaven. Heaven is already receiving millions of prayer from all around the world so a few dozen extra prayers coming up from downtown Knightsbridge in one moment in time is not

going to blow the heavenly computers or anything like that it's just more praying and it's how, evidently, on this occasion, they prayed, that is described for us in Acts in 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 and things like that, 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. 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, 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.

We have, several times, in fact at the end of this week we are doing it again; we've been out on a prayer boat on the River Thames. The first time we went out, before we set off a policeman rang me up and I don't know what you feel like but when Detective, Sergeant somebody is on the other end of the line and wants to speak to you I start thinking, oh did I speed on the motorway last week? Anyway I took the call and there had been some publicity in the Evening Standard, which is the London local newspaper, about this plan we had, to go out, as a church and to have a mobile prayer meeting, if you like, on the River Thames in a prayer boat, with a worship band, worshipping and praying and using different sights on the River Thames to pray for London. So that was what we were doing. This policeman rang me up and I started off by being very defensive because he said he wanted to know what this involved and what was going on. I was about to say that we were a private party, and then I thought, hang on a minute; I'm not ashamed of what we are doing. So I said, as a matter of fact we're a Christian Church and we are going to have a prayer meeting on a boat on the River Thames. He said, oh good so am I. So that was very nice, he was a Christian and he was very encouraging. He was

also very helpful because A, he told me there is a highway code on the Thames, like on the road you do one side and up the other side. As we had planned our trip the other way around, that saved us from multiple head-on collisions. And secondly, outside the houses of parliament, there is a 60 metre exclusion zone. How you're supposed to measure that, I don't know. It's quite hard when you're on a boat. What our MP's and our Representatives in the House of the People in the Lords don't like is they don't like being disturbed by a lot of commotion from the river. So this seemed an absolutely golden opportunity to deploy the silent model of prayer. So we arrived off the houses of Parliament, we had about 120 people on board the boat on that occasion and every single one of us knelt and we prayed for our government, we prayed for the MP's, we prayed for the House of Lords (I know it hasn't done them much good) and we asked God to bless our government. Now could we have done that in this room, which is our normal prayer room, answer yes but there is something very galvanising, very focusing to have the actual object of your prayers in front of your very eyes as you are praying. I'm not saying that's essential, but the Houses of Parliament at night time, in the dark, all lit up is a magnificent sight as well. That was just one time when the silent model was effective.

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. Or get someone from outside of your church and then interviewing them, so we can get around them and pray for them and pray for their activity. Our interview is very simple, the reason I say this is we are trying to talk down and pray and worship up in prayer meetings. So the interview is – What's involved, because we need to hear from the person what it is about, for example if we have the leader of our children's work in, it's helpful to know how many children are involved, how many people are in the team that look after the children's classes and other details and information i.e. what are we addressing. And the second question is the important one which is – What's the vision. And there was an occasion when we actually had the then leader of our children's work in to pray for her. And I got to what's the vision and she just started to Proverbs 22:6, I think it is, I'm paraphrasing now, If you look after the well being of the child then he or she will not depart from that way when they grow old. And as she said this, she just started to weep, everybody in the room could relate to the passion in her heart for the children who were in her care. It wasn't hard catch her vision or to go around with her or to stand with her and to pray for her and that that vision would come to pass in the life of the children in the children's church here. So having somebody in to interview them or using scripture in prayer meetings. 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. There is a scripture in Philippians 2: 6 – 11 which is about Jesus the wonderful way of getting the whole focus of the meeting on to Jesus Christ, which is where it ought to be, it's a scripture that begins, Jesus being his very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped and you go on you find yourself focusing and looking at Jesus, if I can put it like that corporately, collectively.

I'm going to skip most of the HTB experience except to say that 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. The advice I always give to anyone who says I'm thinking about starting a prayer meeting, what do you suggest. My advice is make a start. Just advertise the thing and say on Thursday evening at 6.30 (if that is the time) we will be praying, we will be meeting in whatever room for a prayer and worship meeting for 1 hour. Don't think that, unless I've got ½ the congregation there, it's a complete failure, I wouldn't think in those terms at all. Jesus said when two or three are gathered together in my name. The thing is that two people praying for an hour is better than no people praying. The answer is a no-brainer, of course it is. In our experience, we started from the smallest beginnings; we started the current program of prayer in the life of this church with just a handful of people.

The second thing I would say about the models is that the models 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 Joel 2:13 clearly speaking to the people of God through the prophet Joel, he says this "rend your heart and not your garments". It's like we can come together and have a sort of corporate heart. The expression of the heart of this church, or your church, or whatever. Our united heart, if you like. There are 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 what God will listen to is the rending of the heart of his people/ we seek to come to him with what's on his heart, his agenda and his will. Which is what I was talking about earlier. 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 London out or something like that. 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 London that he wants to come to pass in London.

I do also think that, if your thinking in terms of a prayer meeting and I'm sure you all come from churches that are already running prayer meetings, but I think the one hour prayer meetings is a very good useful, basic building block. That is personal prayer as the basic building block; it seems to me a very good building block in terms of different levels of prayer is a one hour meeting. And then there are all sorts of other activities you can do, for example, prayer weekends or New Years Eve prayer parties, nights of prayer, half nights of prayer or whatever. The 1 hour prayer meeting, if you're interested in that. What do you do for 1 hour? Well this is what we do, that's all I can say, we come, we start when we say we will start, and even if there is nobody there we start on time. We worship for about 10 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 maximum 5 minutes and whoever is giving the intro must resist the temptation to preach like the plague. It's simply to focus people, maybe

just to look for example at Acts 1:14 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. Do you remember last week we prayed for this, that or the other, we'll 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 and he was a foreigner and only one came back 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 45 minutes 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 interspersed and mixed in with all of that and with that formula, you will be amazed how quickly the 60 minutes goes and also, how much praying you've done by the end of it, which I think is very important.

Finally I would say that, under the heading of HTB experience, what we have learnt is our job is really very simple. It is just to follow. 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 we did. We visited another church where they had effective corporate prayer. It opened our eyes, but the leader of that church when we went to see him said, "Don't do what we're doing, find out what God has got for you and follow that". And as we have sought to do that we've seen, when we've come to a place and we thought, of 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, 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!

Our job is to follow, with regard to the Alpha course, other aspects of prayer relating to Alpha, the fifth week of the Alpha course, I'm delighted to say 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. Praying in small groups, as I think you have heard or will be hearing, don't do that too soon. Don't rush that. You know 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 will got 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. 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. If you think about it, 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 we has got 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 is 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 and including a healing of the land. Beyond that, who knows what impact into the lives of other nations and all the rest of it?