

TEACH US TO PRAY ... Portraits of Prayer

Week 4: Job (Familiarity to Intimacy)

Inspired by John White's book "People in Prayer", this series looks at 6 portraits of people from the Bible who dare to draw near to God in prayer. People pleading, praising, confessing, interceding. People being changed as they draw closer to God.

Different people from within Ruach have prepared each week of this series.

This week's video and notes have been prepared by Mike Zeppel

CHECK IN

How did you go with the last lot of weekly prayer challenges?

INTRODUCTION

The portrait of prayer that we are looking at today is Job, as he encounters God in the middle of pain and catastrophe.

WATCH the first part of the video by Mike:

- YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/84jHBJkUGto>
- **Pause** the video when it lists the Bible passages to look at and read them together

Side note: People can re-watch the included animation about the book of Job at home on RightNow Media. It's part of the Bible Project Wisdom series. Find it in the RightNow Media Ruach library, under Housechurch Resources May/June 2018. There's also a good explanation of the book of Job (and other Bible books) in the "Read Scripture" resource in that same section.

READ

1. Job 38: 1-7.

- What is God trying to get Job to comprehend in this passage?

2. Job 40: 1 – 5.

- Job responds to God's questioning. Compare what Job says in vs 4 & 5 with what he said to God in chapter 30:20-21. What has changed?

(Leader: Note that there is no longer a focus on God's absence, but on Job's smallness. He has moved from complaining to contriteness)

3. Job 42: 1-6

- How would you describe the difference in Job, from Chapter 40 to here in Chapter 42?
- What HAD to happen in Chapter 40 for Job to be able to say what he says in this passage? (Repentance)

4. Based on these passages, how would you describe Job's Prayer journey? Does it expand your definition of prayer? If so, in what way?

WATCH the next section of the video and pause when instructed to discuss what has been said so far, and the following questions.

DISCUSSION

Have a look at the actions listed below. With a partner, list them on a scale of 1 to 10 of what could move us to deeper intimacy with God. (No right answers! just to prompt discussion.)

Going to Hillsong conference	Reading Books by Christian authors
Meditating on the Psalms	Never ever complaining to God
Working in or attending a Christian School or Organisation	Playing Christian music in the car
Not using bad language when around Church folk	Planning to have time with God but letting it go because darn life is busy!
Going to HC regularly	Regular prayer

1. SO.... what has actually worked for you to draw you into deeper intimacy? Be honest.
2. CONSIDER the following statement: "God doesn't need to make our lives sugar coated and sweet in order for us to follow him". Are we guilty of sometimes squirming our way through seasons of pain, instead of singing "You give and take away/Blessed be your Name"?

WATCH the final section of the video.

PRAYER ACTIVITY

As you pray for each other consider:

- What area of your life displays a basic familiarity with Jesus of Nazareth, if not really intimacy?
- Do you long for a similar experience that Job had?
- When you choose to move from familiarity to intimacy, what might that look like?
- Can you do it by yourself?
- Is house church a place where you can be transparent?

WEEK 4 PRAYER CHALLENGES

If Jesus is teaching us to pray, then we learn by doing. Take the "weekly challenges" seriously and you will grow in your prayer life AND encourage others as you report on your progress each week.

Pray the following prayers each day this week. In doing so, think about how you are showing reverence to Christ through these prayers. Let it also be a reminder that faith activities are part of every day life, not just for when we are meeting together as church.

- "Heavenly Father, I activate my free will and choose to live in your peace today. May your Holy Spirit guide me and show me how.
In Jesus' name I pray,
Amen."
- "Heavenly Father, I activate my free will and choose to live in a healthy fear of you today. May your Holy Spirit guide me and show me how.
In Jesus' name I pray,
Amen."

TEACH US TO PRAY ... Portraits of Prayer

Week 5: Moses (A Journey Marked By Prayer)

Inspired by John White's book "People in Prayer", this series looks at 6 portraits of people from the Bible who dare to draw near to God in prayer. People pleading, praising, confessing, interceding. People being changed as they draw closer to God.

Different people from within Ruach have prepared each week of this series.

This week's notes have been prepared by Sally Molyneux

CHECK IN: Share the goals you had for last week and how it was for you. However it was, just share.

PRE-TEACHING ACTIVITY: Write down a minimum of five words that you would use to describe God. Share if you like. (You'll need to refer back to your list later.)

INTRODUCTION: There is a church in Rome called St Peter In Chains. This is because it holds old relics of chains said to be those that held the Apostle Peter a prisoner. However, the church also remarkably holds the marble sculpture of Moses by Michelangelo. (You can find a picture online if you wish). He portrayed Moses as an impressive presence, strong and prince like, and looking like a leader. And indeed Moses was a leader - a very reluctant one. The first appointed leader by God of an emerging nation. A nation that was miraculously delivered by God from Egypt. They would become God's chosen people, and a nation through whom salvation would come for the whole world.

But nothing could be more reluctant and meek than Moses' "burning" bush prayer and cry to God in Exodus 4:13 when he was called by God to go to Egypt. "Please God, send someone else."

But nothing could be more courageous than his prayer in Exodus 32 to spare the people from God's burning anger to totally destroy them and start again. It is a different Moses, and his two prayers in this chapter reflect his developing relationship with God. It is this chapter, 32, we will look at today.

In looking at Chapter 32, the details of the story surrounding this prayer can be difficult for us in today's world. However, we should not shrink from those parts of God that we may not understand, or are not palatable in comparison to current day life and expected responses. Today's reading is a little sobering.

As John White says in "People of Prayer", "Our God remains a God of Holy Judgement.... The God of Sinai is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.... He does not mellow with the passage of time. He is the God of law. He is the God of grace."

This does not mean we take on judgement of others ourselves. It is God who will judge us, not each other.

PRAY: For God to reveal a glimpse of Himself to you, both as an individual and as a House Church.

This is the context of the prayer we are looking at:

Moses is on Mt Sinai alone with God who is putting in place a Covenant between Himself and the people, and establishing laws for them to live by. The people have been rescued and saved by God's multiple miraculous actions in Egypt; God has provided for them each day with food and water; they have gathered at the foot of the mountain in Exodus 19 & Exodus 24, and agreed to a Covenant as Moses walked up and down the mountain as the "go between" to make sure they understood. They all actually heard God's voice, and trembled as the mountain trembled with them when the Glory of God descended upon it.

READING: Exodus 32

I (Sally) actually briefly considered leaving out sections of this chapter to make it more palatable for us. However, in our world today of almost anything goes “as long as we don’t harm anyone else” (as people say) we don’t need a watered down version of understanding who God is when it comes to sin. When Jesus died on the cross, taking our sin with Him, Jesus said “My God My God, why have you forsaken me?” (He is directly quoting Psalm 22:1.) God the Father, at that crucial point in time, separated Himself from Jesus because of the sin he carried for us.

- Why was God’s anger so huge? We are all stubborn and stiff-necked people at times. Discuss.

Re-read Moses first prayer of the chapter in verses 11-14

- What stood out to you in reading this first prayer? Discuss.

This first prayer was before Moses knew the extent of the people’s rebellion and rejection, before he walked back down to the camp. His love for God and love for the people is evident here. However one thing he also definitely knew as he stood in God’s presence on the mountain was God’s passionate response to their sin.

John White in “People in Prayer” says, “If you are to know the boldness and passion of Moses’ prayer you must stand where Moses stood. You must see our God as a consuming fire. ... You can never experience the urgency of intercession until you see sin from God’s perspective.”

Re-read the second prayer in verses 31-34

Moses stood in this presence of all consuming-ness. God rejected Moses’ offer to blot himself out along with the people. Again God relents, but announces punishment.

- Consider how strongly Moses identified with God’s people. What can Moses’ prayer teach us today?

For example:

- Do we think of the church worldwide as “us” and how do we pray for them? Do we identify with and pray for the Christian church in our nation and worldwide, as well as for our own?
- What do we do when a Christian leader (or any Christian for that matter) is exposed publicly with his or her sin? Do we ever pray for them and that part of the body of Christ?

ACTION

- In the beginning you wrote down at least five words that described God. Do you now wish to add any words to that list?
- Preview the prayer challenges for this week.
- Pray together now for the church worldwide as suggested in prayer challenge no. 5

Extra for home:

Have a look at another prayer of Moses, Exodus 33: 12-22. In this prayer Moses realises they (he and the people) are nothing unless the presence of God goes with them. The people needed to understand who God is if His presence was to physically move with them. Moses needed to “see” and understand more the “beyond words” presence of God’s Glory. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of Israel, is no wooden or golden idol cast by human hands. He is beyond our human comprehension.

WEEK 5 PRAYER CHALLENGES

If Jesus is teaching us to pray, then we learn by doing. Take the “weekly challenges” seriously and you will grow in your prayer life AND encourage others as you report on your progress each week.

- (1) Choose five words from your list and allocate one per day.
- (2) Ask God to widen your understanding of Him through that word.
- (3) Find a verse that reflects that description of God. Use that as your base to prayer.
- (4) Write down what revelation you had, or any thoughts that connected.
- (5) Pray for the Church worldwide each day without standing in judgement, but rather standing with them. For example, you could pray for churches under persecution in almost any continent, or for those churches with a lot of responsibility for overseeing great wealth who probably need just as much wisdom and discerning leadership. And not least of all, for those who have been victims of our churches’ abusive and inappropriate behaviours.

TEACH US TO PRAY ... Portraits of Prayer

Week 6: Jacob (Strength from Weakness)

Inspired by John White's book "People in Prayer", this series looks at 6 portraits of people from the Bible who dare to draw near to God in prayer. People pleading, praising, confessing, interceding. People being changed as they draw closer to God.

Different people from within Ruach have prepared each week of this series.

This week's notes have been prepared by Joshua Batchelder

CHECK IN

How's your prayer life going? Any feedback from engaging with recent prayer challenges?

INTRODUCTION TO JACOB

Jacob was son of Isaac and Rebekah, and the grandson of Abraham, through whom God had promised to bless all peoples on earth. Out of the fifty chapters in Genesis, ten of them are written about Jacob and the events concerning him. Yet Jacob grew up selfish and self-centred, distrusting of others and manipulative. His very name meant '*he deceives.*' Why then was he so important, and what can Jacob's life teach us about prayer?

To answer this question, we need to consider Jacob's testimony, and journey from distrust of God to dependence on God. Right back before Jacob and his twin brother Esau were born, God spoke to Rebekah about the babies jostling within her.

The Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

Genesis 25:3

God had already chosen Jacob to be a part of fulfilling his covenant to Abraham since before Jacob's birth (Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 15:1-20). Yet despite God's promises, Jacob chose to rely on himself alone to gain his blessings. He coerced his starving brother into giving up his birthright for some stew and bread, and even disguised himself as his brother to steal his father's blessing from Esau. After taking his brother's blessing, Jacob fled to Haran to escape Esau's rage, as his brother sought to kill him in vengeance. Yet despite Jacob's sins, God did not forsake Jacob, but spoke to him in a vision at Bethel (Genesis 28:10-17), reminding him of the covenant God would fulfil through Jacob, and the blessings he would receive.

DISCUSS

- How do you think Esau would feel after such a deep betrayal by his brother? Do you feel more sympathetic towards him or Jacob, who was chosen by God?
- What is a situation in which, like Jacob, you have found it difficult to trust God, and instead relied on yourself rather than seeking Him and believing in His plans for you?

It was not until Jacob was confronted with his own powerlessness that he finally recognised he needed to seek God's help, rather than relying only on himself. As his brother approached with four hundred men, many years after Jacob's flight, Jacob chose to pray and seek God's help, acknowledging that he needed God's strength because his own was lacking.

READ: *Genesis 32:9-12*

DISCUSS

- How do you think Jacob felt as he prayed this?

- Jacob had recognised his own helplessness and humbled himself before approaching God and asking for help. Why is it important to do this in our own lives as we pray?

By humbling himself and asking for God's help, Jacob had finally recognised that he needed God to provide for him. It was shortly after Jacob prayed this prayer that he encountered God in a vivid, dramatic way.

READ: *Genesis 32:22-32*

DISCUSS

- The passage says that the man 'wrestled with Jacob', making it clear that God was the initiator of the struggle. Why do you think God chose to appear to Jacob in this way?
- Jacob asked for a blessing, showing he understood his opponent was divine. If Jacob knew this, why did he continue to struggle against someone he should know he couldn't defeat?
- After Jacob struggled with God, he was asked his name. In giving it, he was acknowledging his past identity and deceptions, humbling himself. In return, God gave him a new identity and name, Israel. From this, what can we learn about being honest and humble with who we are before God?

Jacob's recognition of his own helplessness and need for God's salvation in a time of fear and hardship for him gave him desperation for God's provision. Even when his hip was wrenched, probably making it impossible to stand, it was this desperate faith that kept him striving for God's blessing against all odds – the opposite thing to what he had been doing most of his life. Jacob clung to God, both physically and metaphorically, because he knew that God was his only chance in the midst of his difficulties.

DISCUSS

- Jacob's tenacious faith and persistence for God was rewarded. How can we show the same kind of faith in our prayer lives?
- How can we show humility when asking God for something in prayer?

PRAYER ACTIVITY

Prepare four large envelopes labeled:

- Work & School/Studies
- Relationships
- Leisure time & activities
- Thought life & emotions

Have pens and note paper available.

Ask everyone to think about areas of their life where they might find it hard to let God into, or to admit their need for God in. Use the life areas that are written on the envelopes. For each area that God is prompting you about, on separate pieces of paper, write an invitation to God to enter and work in that part of your life. Be as specific as you wish, no one else will be reading the invitation. Put your invitation in the appropriate common envelope.

When everyone is finished, pray as a group for each of the areas one by one, giving that area of your lives to God. Prayers can be as specific or general as you wish. You may want to symbolically lay hands on the envelope as you pray for that area and the invitations it contains. (Or some other means of focusing attention on that area.)

(At the end of the time give back or destroy the invitations).

WEEK 6 PRAYER CHALLENGES

If Jesus is teaching us to pray, then we learn by doing. Take the “weekly challenges” seriously and you will grow in your prayer life AND encourage others as you report on your progress each week.

- Spend some time each day giving each part of your life you feel helpless in to God, and asking for his blessing on them.
- Take a few minutes in prayer to come before God, hiding nothing about yourself but humbly offering up who you are to God in prayer.