

'Hear Our Prayer'
Lent Course 2025 Session 4
Esther – Communal Prayer

LEADER'S NOTES

Gathering (5 minutes)

Welcome members to the group and ensure they all know each other.

Ask group members if they have had any thoughts or reflections on last week's session.

Opening Prayer

You may like to pray by name for every member of the group.

Then lead this or another prayer:

Lord Jesus as you taught your disciples,
so teach us to pray.
Give us honesty in our confession,
ambition in our intercession,
eloquence in our praise and
humility in our thanksgiving.
Help us to trust in the power of prayer,
and as we pray,
give us renewed joy in the hope of your salvation.
For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit
one God for ever and ever.
Amen.

Introduction

Use these or other words:

Welcome to session 4 of our Lent Course, 'Hear our Prayer.' The aim of the Course is to deepen our lives of prayer in the company of some characters from the Old Testament.

This week we will be in the company of Esther. Finding herself as Queen of Persia, she was courageous enough to intervene to save her people. In so doing she was strengthened by the prayers of her community. So this week we will think about communal prayer.

Biblical Reflection (15 minutes)

Give some background

Esther is the Queen of Persia, so a Jewish queen in a vast, gentile empire. An official called Haman is plotting to kill the Jews and only Esther has the power to intervene. But doing so places her in danger. Here is the conversation between her and Mordecai, her stepfather and a Jewish leader, when she describes this risk from Esther 4:9-17.

Read the passage slowly and clearly.

⁹ Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰ Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, ¹¹ 'All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden sceptre to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days.' ¹² When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, ¹³ Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, 'Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴ For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.' ¹⁵ Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶ 'Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.' ¹⁷ Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Leave a time of silence.

Ask the following or similar question:

- What is it that gives Esther strength and the courage to approach the king?
- What does Esther's story teach us about prayer?

Talk (15 minutes)

Watch the Video. It can be seen on the Blackburn Diocesan Website or on the Fruitful app.

Discussion (20-25 minutes)

Lead a time of conversation. The following questions will help but feel free to choose just a few of them or ask your own.

- Do you find it easier to pray alone or pray with others?
- Many people say, 'I don't need to go to church. I can just pray in my own home.' How would you answer them?
- Are there times when you have been especially aware of others praying for you? Describe those times to each other.
- What are the times and places when you pray with others? How might you add to these?
- Do you ever pray as a family? If you do, what is your pattern? If you don't, what prevents you?
- How easy do you find it to pray during the course of public worship? What things put you off?
- Do you do anything to prepare yourself for worship in advance?
- Which are the parts of an act of worship that most draw you into prayer?

Prayer (15 minutes)

This week we will use liturgy to pray communally. What follows is an order for Compline. If you are meeting earlier in the day you may like to use another Office for example Prayer During the Day. This can be found on a free app called 'Time to Pray.'

Invite people to pray through the liturgy using the advice and ideas given during the talk. Lead it slowly with times of silence.

(If you prefer to use traditional language, the order from the 1928 Book of Common Prayer can be found [here.](#))

Preparation

The Lord almighty grant us a quiet night and a perfect end.

Amen.

Our help is in the name of the Lord
who made heaven and earth.

As we reflect on the day that is drawing to close let us call to mind our sins, confessing our failues to love God or to love our neighbours.

A period of silence for reflection on the past day may follow.

**Most merciful God,
we confess to you,
before the whole company of heaven and one another,
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed
and in what we have failed to do.
Forgive us our sins,
heal us by your Spirit
and raise us to new life in Christ. Amen.**

O God, make speed to save us.

O Lord, make haste to help us.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

The following or another suitable hymn may be said or sung

Before the ending of the day,
Creator of the world, we pray
That you, with steadfast love, would keep
Your watch around us while we sleep.

From evil dreams defend our sight,
From fears and terrors of the night;
Tread underfoot our deadly foe

That we no sinful thought may know.

O Father, that we ask be done
Through Jesus Christ, your only Son;
And Holy Spirit, by whose breath
Our souls are raised to life from death.

The Word of God

Psalmody

Use one or all of the following psalms. Encourage the people to speak the words slowly and prayerfully with the leaders saying the odd numbered verses and the people the even numbered verses.

Psalm 4

1 Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness;
you set me at liberty when I was in trouble;
have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

2 How long will you nobles dishonour my glory;
how long will you love vain things and seek after falsehood?

3 But know that the Lord has shown me his marvellous kindness;
when I call upon the Lord, he will hear me.

4 Stand in awe, and sin not;
commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.

5 Offer the sacrifices of righteousness
and put your trust in the Lord.

6 There are many that say, 'Who will show us any good?'
Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us.

7 You have put gladness in my heart,
more than when their corn and wine and oil increase.

8 In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for it is you Lord, only, who make me dwell in safety.

Psalm 91 verses 1-7

1 Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
and abides under the shadow of the Almighty,

2 Shall say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my stronghold,
my God, in whom I put my trust.'

3 For he shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence.

4 He shall cover you with his wings
and you shall be safe under his feathers;
his faithfulness shall be your shield and buckler.

5 You shall not be afraid of any terror by night,
nor of the arrow that flies by day;

6 Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor of the sickness that destroys at noonday.

7 Though a thousand fall at your side
and ten thousand at your right hand,
yet it shall not come near you.

Psalm 134

1 Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord,
you that by night stand in the house of the Lord.

2 Lift up your hands towards the sanctuary
and bless the Lord.

3 The Lord who made heaven and earth
give you blessing out of Zion.

At the end of the psalmody, the following is said together

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Scripture Reading

Jesus said to them, 'So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!' *(Luke 11, 9-13)*

Silence is kept

Responsory

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.
Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

For you have redeemed me, Lord God of truth.
I commend my spirit.

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit.
Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

Keep me as the apple of your eye.
Hide me under the shadow of your wings.

The Gospel Cantic

The Nunc dimittis (The Song of Simeon) is said

**Save us, O Lord, while waking,
and guard us while sleeping,
that awake we may watch with Christ
and asleep may rest in peace.**

- 1 Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace:
your word has been fulfilled.
- 2 My own eyes have seen the salvation
which you have prepared in the sight of every people;
- 3 A light to reveal you to the nations
and the glory of your people Israel.

Luke 2.29-32

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

**Save us, O Lord, while waking,
and guard us while sleeping,
that awake we may watch with Christ
and asleep may rest in peace.**

The Prayers

Intercessions and thanksgivings may be offered here.

The Collect

Visit this place, O Lord, we pray,
and drive far from it the snares of the enemy;
may your holy angels dwell with us and guard us in peace,
and may your blessing be always upon us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

God of Mission
who alone brings growth to your Church,

send your Holy Spirit to give
vision to our planning,
wisdom to our actions,
joy to our worship,
and power to our witness.
Help our church to grow in numbers,
in spiritual commitment to you,
and in service to our local community,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Our Father...

The Conclusion

In peace we will lie down and sleep;
for you alone, Lord, make us dwell in safety.

Abide with us, Lord Jesus,
for the night is at hand and the day is now past.

As the night watch looks for the morning,
so do we look for you, O Christ.

The Lord bless us and watch over us;
the Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us;
the Lord look kindly on us and give us peace.
Amen.

FINAL NOTE BEFORE PEOPLE LEAVE:

Next week we will be thinking about constancy in prayer and setting for ourselves a Rhythm of Prayer.
Please bring with you a pen and some paper.