



Week of Prayer

From 3-10 February, the Moderator is inviting us to join together in a special time of prayer.

Taking his theme 'Building relationships – Christ's love compels us', Dr McMullen places emphasis on our personal walk with Jesus Christ: "I am mindful that the Christian life rises and falls at the point of the devotional. During the week, I would encourage you individually, therefore, to take some extra time to be still in God's presence and to wait upon him."

DAY 1 | Read Psalm 84: 'Building relationships as we prepare for worship.'

The psalmist speaks of his longing for the courts of the Lord. This morning, as you prepare to go to church, take time to be still and pray that you will encounter the living God in worship. Pray for your minister leading the service and preaching. Ask God's blessing also on choirs and singing groups, Sunday school and Bible class leaders, those who will welcome at the doors, giving thanks for their dedication. That many today would meet Jesus for the first time or in a deeper way.

Pray for all who will gather in the congregation. As the sparrow finds a home and the swallow a nest (vv3-4), that our congregations would be warm and hospitable.

Remember those who are hurting, broken, empty, lonely, bereaved, ill, feeling anxious or afraid (vv6-7). Where relationships in congregations have become tense or difficult, pray that the Lord would bring peace and reconciliation.

Take time to pray for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, all those who will be meeting in many different settings today. Ask the Lord to pour out his favour and blessing. That all our people would, in the words of the Shorter Catechism, glorify God and enjoy him forever.

DAY 2 | Read 2 Chronicles 7:1-16: 'Building relationships – Christ's love compels us.'

This is an incredible episode as human hands complete building the Temple and the Lord pours out his Spirit. There is praise, worship, celebration and dedication. The people give thanks to the Lord, saying, "He is good, his love endures forever." There is also, however, the solemn reminder of the importance of humbling ourselves and being repentant as we seek God's face.

What a wonderful prayer that the Lord would pour out his blessing on and revive our entire denomination. In the words of the hymn: "Come, almighty to deliver,/Let us all your grace receive;/suddenly return, and never,/nevermore your temples leave./ You we would be always blessing,/serve you as your hosts above,/pray and praise you without ceasing,/glory in your perfect love."

May that prayer begin with each and every one of us. That we would also take time to apply the words of 2 Chronicles 7:14 seriously, asking the Lord to humble us in our pride and arrogance, and to forgive our sin. In our constant activities and busyness for the kingdom, we have forgotten the overriding importance of spending time in his presence.

Finally, may we all have this longing: "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary..." (Psalm 63:1-5)

DAY 3 | Read Psalm 139: 'Building my personal relationship with God.'

Praise God for his saving grace and unconditional love; his absolute truth and the splendour of his holiness; his greatness and power. Thank him that he sent his Son into the world to live the life of perfect obedience and to die on the cross. Acknowledge newness and fullness of life found in Christ alone and the transforming power of his Holy Spirit as we place our hope and confidence in him.

Rejoice in the complete care and knowledge of his children seen in Psalm 139. We are hemmed in by the Lord on every side and cannot escape his protection and care. He knew us even when we were knit together in our mother's womb and has the perfect plan and purpose for our lives in Christ. Take time to bless him for the many ways in which he has looked after you and provided for you.

Now read Psalm 139:23-24 thoughtfully. Invite the Lord to search every attitude of your heart and mind. Confess sins of thought, word and deed and know once more that you are forgiven. Repent of all that denies you a closer relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and by the help of his Spirit invite him to "lead you in the way everlasting". As Paul writes: "Not that I have already obtained all this... but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (Philippians 3:12).

DAY 4 | Read Romans 12: 'Building relationships in my congregation.'

Here Paul gives a wonderful picture of people offering themselves completely to the worship of God (vv1-2). Body life functions perfectly as people give themselves in various kinds of service and activity (vv3-8). Strong relationships are based on love for one another – sharing together, living in humility, exercising forgiveness, overcoming evil with good. Dwell on any particular verses that strike or challenge you.

Now give God thanks for the congregation where you belong, acknowledging the faithfulness of so many people over the years and those in particular who have influenced you for good.

Pray for those who lead Sunday worship and ask God that there would be a deepening sense of his presence in services and other activities.

Remember the importance of discipleship and the equipping of God's people to serve in their different areas of work and activity during the week. That our congregations would be places of welcome and ever deepening community, where more and more people are involved. Pray for the healing of any fractured relationships. Acknowledge the outreach in which your congregation is involved in the local community, and pray for people to be drawn in.

DAY 5 | Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-21: 'Building relationships throughout PCI.'

Paul describes the church of Jesus Christ as the body of believers. "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts, and though its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ."

In our prayers today we remember our wider denomination at home and overseas.

Please remember your minister in sermon preparation and providing pastoral care. If you have additional staff and team members in your congregation, ask a blessing on them. Pray for kirk session and committee as they take important decisions about the way ahead and manage building and finance. Give God thanks for leaders of organisations and ask the Lord to equip, refresh and renew them.

Pray for neighbouring congregations and the entire presbytery to which you belong. That presbyteries would be places of envisioning and equipping as well as where ministers and elders find friendship, support and encouragement.

Pray for our General Assembly, that God would give wisdom and discernment, guidance and direction in so many important areas. Remember all who hold posts and positions throughout our denomination at home and overseas. Ask God to bless our witness right across the age range from uniformed organisations to elderly care.

DAY 6 | Read Romans 13:1-8: 'Building relationships in our politics.'

Our passage today underlines the importance of praying for those in government and authority over us. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland covers two political jurisdictions, which means we can pray for politicians at Westminster, Belfast and Dublin. Ask God to bless HM The Queen and the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins.

We are all acutely aware of the political impasse at Stormont where the institutions have failed to deliver for just over two years. In the meantime, among many others, our schools and health service are suffering from decisions that have failed to be taken. Relationships between the major parties are fractured. Pray that there would be an end to the impasse and a way forward found for the greater good of all.

Remember the Irish government and the outworking of the recent abortion referendum, that there would be maximum protection for life in the womb and that abortion would be rare.

Confusion reigns over Brexit and a lack of clarity about the way forward. Pray that the Lord would guide our national politicians and at the end of the process may there be healing and reconciliation, given all the recent divisions in families and political parties.

DAY 7 | Read Jeremiah 29:1-14: 'Building relationships in wider community.'

The prophet speaks to those living in Babylonian exile and instructs them to settle for the duration. There are universal principles in the passage as we are called to pray for the peace and prosperity of the city where we live. We remember too that the Lord has a good plan and purpose for all his children.

Pray today for all who serve in your local community. You may feel led to remember teachers in primary and secondary schools; doctors and nurses in hospitals; police officers and emergency services; social workers and carers.

Take time to ask God to pour out his favour on local businesses, many of which are under tremendous financial pressure. Pray for our high streets and shopping centres, that they would prosper, but at the same time our society would not be driven by endless consumerism. We pray as well for major employers in our community. Now turn your thoughts to your own neighbourhood and pray for those who live around you, particularly those who do not yet know Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Finally, we pray for those who are isolated and lonely; the broken and neglected; the aged and infirm; families where there is ongoing tension; the homeless and refugees.

DAY 8 | Read Psalm 100: 'Building relationships to the ends of the earth.'

Pilgrims arriving at the Temple would have read the opening words of this psalm facing outwards to the lands from which they had travelled and beyond. They then entered God's gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.

Today spend time remembering the nations of the world, particularly those with which you have a personal contact or where members of your congregation might be serving. Pray for those serving overseas with PCI. Give God thanks for our annual World Development Appeal and the change it brings to many lives. Take time to pray for regimes under which it is difficult to practice as a Christian and where there is open persecution.

Come closer to home and spend time praying for Ireland, north and south, east and west, as the Lord leads you. You might want to include our deaconesses, full-time workers as well as staff in residential facilities. Concentrate on the important outreach to those who do not yet know Jesus.

Finally, spend time praising God for the faith you have found in him. You might want to remember favourite Bible verses or passages that have sustained you on your journey or times when you have felt God's guiding hand so clearly.