

A person with long, curly hair, seen from the back, wearing a patterned shawl. Their right hand is raised in a gesture of prayer or expectation. The background is dark, and the lighting highlights the texture of the hair and the pattern of the shawl.

EXPECTANT

What can we expect as followers of Jesus? What is it meant to look like?

Small Group Study Guide | 4th September

Topic: What can Christians expect from God in response to their prayers?

Bible passages: Luke 18: 1-8. Ephesians 6

INTRODUCTION

C.S. Lewis in his book on Prayer (Letters to Malcolm) makes the point that if our prayers were always 'answered' or never answered that would be easier to understand than if our prayers were sometimes answered. What are we entitled to expect from God in terms of answers to prayer? What is Christian prayer meant to look like anyway?

QUESTIONS

- a) 'To be in your presence'. Psalm 131 speaks of being still in God's presence. How important are our words in prayer? What might 'listening prayer' look like if you tried it? Dan Rather, CBS anchor, once asked Mother Teresa what she said during her prayers. She answered, "I listen." So Dan turned the question and asked, "Well then, what does God say?" Mother Teresa smiled with confidence and answered, "He listens." For an instant, Dan didn't know what to say. "And if you don't understand that," Mother Teresa added, "I can't explain it to you."
 - b) We talk about the tension between the 'urgent' and the 'vital.' What is your experience of 'urgent' prayer. How much is prayer a vital part of your life in non-urgent times?
 - c) Why might the persistent prayer described in Luke 18 make a difference to the answers we get?
 - d) Why do you think Woodlands finds attendance at prayer meetings low? How does corporate prayer help our individual prayer life? How will you engage in Woodlands prayer week?
 - e) In the mystery of unanswered prayer, what can we expect from God whenever we pray, even if our 'petitions' are not answered as we wanted?
 - f) Did Jesus ever experience unanswered prayer?
-

Small Group Study Guide | 11th September

Topic: Vision Sunday. What is our expectation for Church in this season?

INTRODUCTION

Vision is vital to our mission. It is a vision of what God is calling us to be and to accomplish in His power. We need vision and the familiar (though linguistically inaccurate) phrase 'Without vision, the people perish' is as true as ever. It is said that 'Vision leaks' which is why we take time to articulate our vision each year.

QUESTIONS

- a) Can you articulate the vision for the Woodlands Church family? What is it?
 - b) What is the vision of the small group you belong to?
 - c) Do you have a spiritual vision, spiritual ambition for your own life? Can you share that with your group if so?
 - d) How does your vision fit with and contribute to our communal vision of what it means to be a Church in the city of Bristol?
-

Small Group Study Guide | 18th September

Topic: Sacrificial love. What is our expectation of the high call to love God with all our hearts, and love our neighbours as ourselves?

Bible passages: 1 Cor 13. Mark 8:34.

INTRODUCTION

Today George Snyman, founder of 'Hands at Work' in southern Africa will be visiting our 11 am service. This ministry is hugely sacrificial, loving and caring for some of the poorest people in the world.

QUESTIONS

- a) How do non-Christians expect Christians to love- based on our own publicity?
 - b) What do we expect God is calling us to, in a life of obedience to the law of love? What do we think it looks like? In particular, what are the tensions between loving feelings and loving actions? Do 'good deeds' have any value if we don't feel loving?
 - c) Is God asking too much from us? Do we feel burdened by the needs of the world and our own needs and limitations?
 - d) What is God really looking for in His people, and how does it work? How are we absorbed into the life of the beloved? How does laying down our own life really help us to get hold of His life and 'life in all its fulness'?
-

Small Group Study Guide | 25th September

Topic: Life in the Spirit. What is our expectation of the Spirit filled life?

Bible passages: Galatians 5

INTRODUCTION

Life in the Spirit is the invitation for all Christians to enter in to. (Acts 2: 38-39 Gal 5:16). What Jesus and scripture seem to offer is a life that is 'overflowing', with 'rivers of living water flowing out of our inmost being' John 7:38.

QUESTIONS

- a) Many of us have had intense and wonderful spiritual experiences, our 'mountain tops'. Why can't we stay there?
 - b) How much is 'life in the Spirit' an initiatory experience (like being born) or an ongoing experience (like keeping hydrated)? What does the bible say and what is your experience?
 - c) How do rational and material beings like us become 'naturally supernatural'? What do you understand by that phrase?
 - d) What place do regular rhythms of Church and devotional practice have (if any) in keeping us alive in the Spirit?
 - e) Where does the Bible talk about 'quenching the Spirit'? What does that mean? How does it happen?
 - f). Is our expectation of what the Christian life should look like too low? Do we settle for things rather than taking hold of things? How much is the spiritual life God's gift or our effort?
-