

1 Open (Blessed are the spiritually poor)

Welcome to the City Life Evening meeting – Sunday 22 March 2020! Online for the first time.

Only last Monday PM announced it is time to avoid all non-essential contact with others, putting an end to social gatherings. And now schools are closed, with no timetable for when they will reopen. Y6 students may well have finished their primary school, just like that.

I've been shocked and to be honest found that I had shortage of faith and peace as the week went on. Difficult to pray. Feeling shallow and shaken. Visit of David and Iris Mineke a couple of weeks ago was timely – Blessed are the spiritually poor – theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

My response is to go to Proverbs 3: Trust in the Lord with all your heart... He will keep you on track

2 God's purpose for City Life and beyond

Plans intended for harm, He intends for good, such as with Joseph and his brothers:

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. — Genesis 50:20 NASB

He is getting our attention. Why is he getting our attention? What is His overall plan?

Ephesians – bring everything together with Jesus as the head of all things, and the church His body:

Ephesians 1:10 [He planned] ... to unify all things and head them up and consummate them in Christ, [both] things in heaven and things on the earth.

Ephesian 1:22 God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. 23 And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.

The fullness of Him who fills everything in every way. That's what God plans for the church to be.

Ephesians 2: 20 Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. 21 We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. 22 Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

Ultimate purpose to bring everything under Jesus – through the church, which is his fullness, his temple where he dwells.

How to be “carefully joined together” and become a temple where God lives by his Spirit?

It's all about where 2 or 3 gather in His name, he is right there, present among them. (Matt 20:18)

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. (NIV)

For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them (NLT)

God is using our social distancing, our fragmentation into households, to bring us to this foundational revelation and promise. For our very households to become Christ-centred communities.

Gathering with a purpose (being intentional)

- Without “His name” we lack purpose, we lack meaning and we lack authority.

- This is agreeing about why we are meeting. We can be together because we are forced to by the need for social distancing, or we can decide that we are a small community gathering around Jesus. A Christ-centred community.

Experiencing the presence of Christ (it's spiritual)

- If we are deciding to gather in Jesus' name, then He promises to be present with us. Our gathering will become a spiritual place.
- Not just Christ-centred, but Christ-filled community.
- Jesus will become more deeply involved in our lives, surprising us with His presence.

Word for 2020 from our prophetic community

Timely! Pick it up and think about it.

- a year of two parts. prepare to receive
- beginnings and endings
- hold fast to the vision
- people find a place to belong.
- fall in love with God again - The picture that accompanied this was of God gently sending **glowing embers** into the congregation, for us to catch and hold and nurture, this would prepare us for the Fire (fullness) of the Holy Spirit. If the fire comes without us learning how to cherish the embers we will not know how to hold the fire and we may resist the refining process. The embers will help us recognise the need to grow and allow the Holy Spirit to refocus us onto relationship with him rather than his works.
- Isaiah 55: A promise of growth, blessing and fruitfulness, but we need to commit to some actions - enlarge, stretch, lengthen, strengthen.

Purpose of 21 days of prayer and fasting

- ask God to save us from the covid-19 – See 2 Chronicles 7:11-22.
- God getting our attention, having removed so much of the distraction of our normal lives
- reboot/reset our journey with Him
- nurturing the embers of His presences and finding new rhythms of grace
- gathering in 2 or 3 in his name - experiencing his presence

[3 How do we go about this 21 day prayer and fasting?](#)

We must be deliberate. Decide in advance what we want to do. This will be a journey, it will be a time of exploration and experimentation.

First a recap on prayer and fasting.

- It is prayer and fasting. Not just fasting.
- Jesus said when, not if.
- Your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.
- Less of something to spend more time with God
- Doesn't make us more righteous, but there is a reward!
- Partial fast, total fast, selective fast, soul fast
- Is 58: the rewards, your salvation will come like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear
- Is 58: righteousness is not just internal: free those wrongly imprisoned, lighten the burden of those who work for you; remember the poor

- don't be overambitious. Set a reasonable fast,
- Stick to it. Commit.

Choose how and when to pray. Create your spiritual program. Activities to catch hold, nurture the embers. Be creative!! It's ok to change as you go.

- Write/discover your own prayers and declarations for this time.
- walk and pray
- paint, draw, sculpt
- morning prayer
- Celtic Daily Prayer
- Lectio 365
- Communion
- Lord's Prayer at midday.
- Evening prayer
- Examen (Rossie)
- City Life Declarations
- O God our help in ages past (Southampton hymn, Isaac Watts).
- 24-7 hour of prayer for coronavirus
- Links to these things at: SoHOP.org/pray

A check list

- encourage yourself when spiritually poor and arm yourself with Proverbs 3;
- Get the big picture of Jesus and the church: Ephesians 1:10,22 and 2:20;
- Read Isaiah 58 for the full picture of fasting and prayer
- Make your decisions about your prayer and fasting.
 - what is your fast going to be
 - when will you set aside time to pray
- Identify your Christ-centred community
 - agree on starting this new thing
 - when to gather?
- Choose activities
 - your own prayers
 - your community
- Start, learn, adapt

We can't do this without faith.

Hebrews 11 lists all the things done by faith. I hope they will add this:

**By faith City Life fasted 21 days,
resetting their journey with God
and finding new rhythms of grace.**