

One Mission bible study

Praying for a change



In parts of Africa, people say that “while the missionaries were teaching us to pray with our eyes closed, they stole our land!” One part of the missionary story has been that as parts of the world were being explored in centuries past, traders, entrepreneurs and the military were part of the mix alongside those who had gone to share the faith of Christ.

Prayer has been at the heart of mission activity – ever since Pentecost when the 3,000 newly baptized “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).



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From very early in the development of Methodism, there was this creative tension between the chapel being a place of prayer and also one where change and working for justice could begin.

As the WMMS was inaugurated, it was determined that monthly missionary prayer meetings should be held in every chapel in the Connexion. These soon became the bedrock for the missionary endeavour of the nineteenth century. Methodists have been described as people of two books: the Bible and

the hymn book. Certainly much of our theology as a Church is found in our hymnody. However, many of the prayers and hymns of the past would leave us feeling embarrassed today but they clearly expressed the conviction of needing to save souls across the world.

*The heathen perish; day by day
Thousands upon thousands pass away
O Christians, to their rescue fly
Preach Jesus to them ere they die.*

(1824 James Montgomery (1771-1854),
The Methodist Hymn-book 1904)

Today one of the gems of Methodism is the *Methodist Prayer Handbook*, which invites people to focus on a particular part of the World Church each day of the month, as well as on part of the Church in Britain. Many preachers and leaders of worship use these prayers week by week in corporate worship. This is increasingly alongside liturgies, prayers and hymns from across the World Church.

Way back in 1818, the WMMS encouraged ladies’ and juvenile ‘branch associations’ and they flourished. Both have been through almost 200 years of life and change. Today the JMA (with their motto to “learn, pray and serve”) continues to envision children to be part of the worldwide Church

of God. In 1858, Wesleyan women formed their own association and began to send and support single women onto the 'mission field'. Today Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB) continues to support the whole Church across the world through prayer and giving – focused in the *Easter Offering* service which began in 1883.

Bible Study

Read Acts 10 – Prayer changes us

This passage has been seen as the turning point in the mission of the early Church. Peter was committed to sharing and spreading the good news of Jesus, crucified and alive, and the early chapters of Acts tell a marvellous story. Yet as a Jew he believed that this gospel was for the Jewish people and so Gentiles would need to be circumcised on their way to becoming followers of Jesus.

Peter goes to pray and God speaks clearly to him through this vision that all are equal. He goes to the home of the Gentile Cornelius, who had received a message from God for Peter. It is in this moment that Peter is changed as he proclaims: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (v. 34).

Although this passage is often called 'the conversion of Cornelius', it is perhaps more importantly understood as the conversion of Peter (see how Peter continues to bring this new revelation to bear upon the early church in Acts 15:1-21).

Prayer lies at the heart of who we are as disciples of Jesus – and it works!

Ten new members

In a church in the centre of Blackburn, the premises are well used throughout the week but only a handful of people gather for worship on a Sunday. A few years ago after morning worship the steward was beaming and foolishly I thought it was about the quality of worship! However it was, as she told me, that only a year before she

had laid a fleece before God and asked for ten new members – "and when I looked around this morning, there were ten people worshipping here today who were not here a year ago". I was saying how wonderful it was when she interrupted me and said, "But I forgot to tell him we wanted young people!"

Response

- **Share together about your prayer life (both as individuals and as a church) and how it influences the decisions you make.**
- **From the beginning of Methodism the chapel became a place where prayer and worship went hand in hand with social action. What is the relationship today between prayer and the search for justice?**
- **How can we bring the 'whole world' more fully into our prayers? For some this is by focusing on mission partners in different parts of the world or through having church/circuit links. Is this something you would like more information on?**
- **Look at the *Prayer Handbook* together and share which prayers speak to you today.**
- **Look through *Singing the Faith* and choose some hymns which you could use as prayers for mission.**
- **Write a hymn or prayer which expresses your understanding of God's Mission today in Britain and across the world (and perhaps... use it in worship soon and send it for publication in the Methodist Prayer handbook.**