



Let's pray:

November 2022

How can we pray well as we head into this new month?



In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses brings a message from God...



**And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but ...to walk in obedience to Him, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?
Deuteronomy 10: 12-13**

**For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.
Deuteronomy 10:17-18**

God is awesome in His power; all authority belongs to Him. Our mighty and awesome God uses His great power and authority to defend the vulnerable, to love the stranger and to give to those most in need.

In Isaiah 61, we read of God's love for justice and of a picture painted of society in which good news is proclaimed to the poor and the broken-hearted are cared for; in which captives are freed and those who mourn are comforted. We read of renewal and restoration, of oppression ended and injustice swept away.

We have been made in the image of God. Each of us, whoever we are, are created to bear His likeness. The image of God in us shines most brightly when we reflect His heart. And out of that heart justice flows. Justice matters to God, so therefore, it should matter in some way to us.

Yet when we read the Bible, and when we look beyond the pages into the world around us, it's clear that along the way, humans have lost sight of this part of God's heart. As we follow the story of God's people, we see they repeatedly fall short of their calling to justice and compassion. In Isaiah chapter 1, God states his distaste for Israel's worship:

**Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me... I cannot bear your worthless assemblies... Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.
Isaiah 1: 17**

Israel have substituted ritual sacrifice for true worship; God is telling them, in no uncertain terms, that worship of Him that fails to include acts of justice, care and compassion, isn't enough.



Jesus is God – he is the perfect image of God. Hebrews 1:3 says, 'His Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance.' In His incarnation, God came to earth, and He dwelt among the poor, the oppressed, the marginalised. Jesus treated men and women equally in a society where women were seen as less important. He welcomed children to him in a radical loving way. He ate with people looked down upon by the rest of society. He stepped close to and touched those viewed as 'unclean'. Jesus challenged racism and xenophobia of his time through his teaching and parables. He encouraged generosity. And, like His Father, Jesus didn't hold back warning the teachers of the law and the Pharisees,

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!” he says in Matthew 23:23. “You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.”



In Jesus, we see God's care for His people demonstrated in word and deed. In Jesus, we see God's love of justice in action. His invitation was to follow him; and if our following of Jesus doesn't include a passion and a pursuit of justice for our neighbours who are disadvantaged and forced to the edge, we might just be missing the point.

Today, we live in a world that is ill with injustice. In the towns, villages and cities we live in, there is injustice. There are people who have been let down by systems that are supposed to protect them, and people who were supposed to care for them. There are people struggling to navigate the waters of life, as challenge after challenge is tossed their way. On our church doorsteps, there are people for whom things are really difficult. There are people who can't be seen through veils of stigma, stereotypes and lies.



Each and every child and young person deserves to live and grow in a stable environment where they'll experience love, care, support, encouragement; where they can laugh loudly, be creative, have a safe space to talk and to feel, where they can play, and they can rest. Yet injustices within the systems and structures and societies that some children and young people find themselves in mean that these things are not available to them.

**What does it look like for us to worship God – our God of justice – when we're aware of the brokenness around us?
What does it look like for us to reflect His heart in places that can be dark?
What does it mean for us to follow Jesus; where would his footsteps take us today?**



Points for Prayer

- Pray for those children and young people in care, and for families for whom injustice in our systems, structures and society means they're not being offered the support and care they deserve. Let's pray that they will receive the practical help, support and care they need in this moment, but let's also pray boldly for change that will allow our communities to thrive.
- Pray for the children and young people who right now are waiting for the right home to be found for them. Let's pray for those children who we know wait the longest, through absolutely no fault of their own. Pray boldly that more people will step forward, with the right skills and in the right places, to be a foster or adoptive family or to care for a teenager through supported lodgings, so that no child waits disproportionately because of the colour of their skin, their age, their disability or medical needs or the fact that they have brothers and/or sisters.
- Pray for families, school staff and others who care for children and young people who are experiencing the impact of the current cost of living crisis. Let's pray that they will be seen, known, understood and comforted in their fear and concern. Let's pray for support that will help those in our communities meet their needs, keeping their homes warm and their bodies nourished. And let's pray big, creative and urgent prayers, that long-term solutions will be found quickly, so that our communities can thrive.
- Pray for the policy-shapers and decision-makers whose work has an enormous impact on the lives of children, young people and families. Pray for those in Government, and those involved in the Review of Children's Social Care in Northern Ireland, and others in positions of power around the UK. These people have the power to make a transformational difference; let's pray for action.



Creative prayer idea

Pray between the lines

The news can often feel overwhelming and hard to take in. While there are positive stories to celebrate, all too often the stories we hear and read are hard and heart-breaking ones. It can be difficult to see the individual, the name, the story behind the headlines and statistics. But we know that behind the figures and percentage signs are real people, each of whom carry a unique story.

If you can, print out a few of the following news articles which have been published by different news outlets over the past few months. If you haven't access to a printer, write a few of the headlines out by hand. Grab a pen, perhaps of a contrasting colour, or some post-it notes. Begin to write prayers for the individuals – adults, children, young people, families, communities – represented in each story. Use the prayer points listed above, write prayers of your own and add words, pictures or Bible verses as you pray.

'Choosing between heat and nappies is my biggest worry' BBC, September 2022

Asylum seekers: Home Office accused of 'catastrophic child protection failure'
The Guardian, October 2022

Manifesto launched calling for children in care to be given more support Belfast Live, October 2022

90% of schools in England will run out of money next year, heads warn The Guardian, October 2022

'People always assume care kids are bad kids' BBC, September 2022

'Nature is striking back': flooding around the world, from Australia to Venezuela
The Guardian, October 2022