

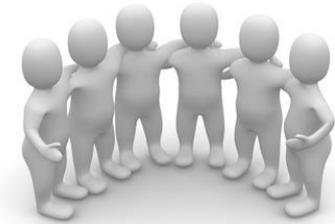
SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

in uncertain times

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1. Praying together

Over the last few months we have provided a series of spiritual exercises. So far these have been designed for individual use. This next set of exercises is for use with others. During lockdown there is a danger that Christians can become isolated from one another. We can avoid this by meeting together regularly to pray, and Zoom makes this very easy to set up.



Begin by inviting a number of people to be your prayer partners, ideally forming a group of 3-6 people who agree to meet regularly, perhaps weekly, for a short time of prayer.

Praying with a common vision

In Matthew 18.19, Jesus says: *If two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.* Choose as your prayer partners people who share your perspective.

Natural groupings are:

- Members of the same family
- Members of a church leadership team
- Members of a small group which otherwise meets for bible study
- Members of a ministry team, eg those who share responsibility for ministry to children
- Members of a choir
- A group of friends

When you meet for the first time, begin by looking at Matthew 18.19 and talking together about the things on which you are agreed in the Lord. Then lead a time of prayer along the following lines. This exercise is deliberately very simple because it's vital in a prayer meeting that each person in the group says something, and this is a way of making sure that they do. If you think it is too simple, then miss out this exercise and go straight to the next one.

Begin by explaining that prayer is talking to God. Anyone who is capable of talking to another person is also capable of talking to God. Explain that Jesus always addressed God as 'Father', so talking to God is similar to talking to your Dad. Jesus also said that there is no special language to be used when we pray, so talking to God is like talking to your Dad in normal language. Explain that when you pray you normally close your eyes; there is no need for this, but because you can't see God your eyes aren't much use. Closing eyes just helps with concentration. Say that you find it helpful to think of God as being quite close, as if he was part of the group.

So when we are sitting with our eyes closed, what shall we say? There are no rules – we can each say whatever we want to say, because God promises to listen. Some people are good at talking, some are less good, but God doesn't mind; he just wants each person to say something, however short. Suggest to the group that you each say something to God in turn. Say that you will pray first, and explain who is to pray next, who third, and so on. Explain that when it is each person's turn to pray, we will all wait until they are ready. You should start the ball rolling; make sure that your prayer is short, and not very eloquent; that will set the tone for the others.

Before you pray, say that you want to suggest something: prayer in a group depends on agreement, so when you pray the first prayer, you would like them all to concentrate hard on what you are saying and do everything they can to agree with you. Assure them that when they pray, you will be doing the same for them. What they must not do when one person is praying is sit there thinking what they will say when it is their turn!

When everyone has said a prayer, say that this is enough for the first session, next time or the one after we will do a bit more. (Because this session is quite short, if you wish, precede it with a reading from scripture or some more formal prayers, for example a confession or creed.)