

# SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

## in uncertain times

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### 3. Praying with Scripture

This exercise is the third in a series for use by a group of Christians praying together. Following on from *Praying together* and *Praying for each other's needs*, this exercise shows how a group can use the scriptures as the basis for its prayers. Taken together, these exercises can be used as a prayer school to teach less experienced people to pray in a fruitful way.



#### Recap

If the group has already completed exercise 10, a number of needs will have been identified and prayed for. So start by inviting people to say whether those prayers have been answered. Then ask everyone to pray for the person on their left, either thanking God for the answered prayer, or reminding him that he has promised to meet our needs and repeating the request.

#### Choose

Now choose a passage which will form the basis of today's prayer time. Good examples would be Ephesians 1.1-14, or the Sermon on the Mount, beginning with Matthew 5.1-12. You may, if you wish, repeat the exercise for several more meetings, until you reach the second half of Ephesians 6 or the second half of Matthew 7.

#### Prepare

The scriptures are only of value if they become the word of God to you, so you will need the help of the Holy Spirit. Turn to Luke 11.9-13 and ask the Holy Spirit to be present as you look at the passage together. You could say this prayer as the leader or, better still, ask for a volunteer to pray on behalf of the group. A group which is full of the Spirit will be able to hear God speaking; it is important that your group gets this experience.

#### Consider

Next, ask the group members to spend a few minutes looking at the chosen passage to see what they can learn about God. As they read they should ask the Spirit to underline anything that is true about God. For example in Ephesians 1.2 we learn that God is our father, and in Matthew 5.4 we learn that God is a comforter. Ask each person to search until they have discovered something which speaks to them. Then divide the group into pairs and ask them to share with their partner what they have been thinking about. Bring them back into the group and invite each person to share what it was that their partner said to them. If appropriate, allow this to lead into a time of group discussion.

#### Pray

It is now time to pray. Start by explaining that praise is telling someone what you like or admire about them. When we praise God that's what we do – we tell God what we like about him. As before, go around the group asking each person to praise God in turn ; remind them to concentrate on what their friends are saying, not on what they will say when it is their turn.

#### Reflect

Ask the group to reread the chosen passage carefully, this time asking God to show them one way in which their lives must change if they are to live as God would have them live. For example, from Ephesians 1.2 somebody might realise that peace comes to them from God, so the way that life for them might change is that whenever they lack peace, they could ask God to give them his peace (which he will!). Or from Matthew 5.9 someone might decide to try to be a peacemaker in a dispute between two of their friends. After a few minutes of reading the passage, ask each person to share what they have decided to do. Then have a second time of prayer beginning with yourself and going around the group. Each person should pray about the decision they have made.

#### Have faith

Finally look at the passage for a third time. This time each group member should look for something that God is promising to do. For example in Ephesians 1.7 God promises to forgive all our sins, and in Matthew 5.4 Jesus teaches that those who are sad will be comforted. Divide the group into threes, and in each triplet share the promises that you have discovered. Then, still in the triplets, pray for each other that God will do as he has promised.