

# SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

## in uncertain times

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### 7. Praying for shared concerns

This is the 7<sup>th</sup> in a series of spiritual exercises aimed at helping a group of Christians to pray together effectively. These notes are written for the group leader.



#### **Meeting together to pray**

Sometimes Christians come together to pray because they have a shared concern or shared responsibility. For example:

- Members of the church pray together for the church and its ministry
- The church staff pray together each week about all aspects of their work
- Those who have a responsibility for leading Sunday worship pray together before the service
- Those who are involved in leading children's work pray together for the children and their families
- Parents pray together for their own family
- Christians who live in a particular city pray together for their city
- Christians who work in a particular building pray together for their work and their colleagues
- Parents whose children all attend a particular school pray together for the school

Such meetings are best if they are regular (eg weekly, monthly) and if those praying are able to attend more or less every time the meeting happens.

#### **A pattern for prayer**

Begin the meeting by inviting people to share their news and concerns. Encourage them to share any answers to prayers in previous meetings, and identify prayers that have not yet been answered. Make sure everyone in the group contributes something to this initial sharing; if the group is too big, share in smaller groups.

As you settle down to pray, begin by asking the group to focus not on their own concerns but on the Lord. Praise him and thank him together; you may choose to sing together. You may also wish to read a passage from scripture. Then ask if anyone in the group has anything to share from their private prayers since the last meeting.

Once the group has set its mind on the Lord, the leader should invite the group to pray about their area of shared concern. At this point, ask the Holy Spirit to teach the group what to say in their prayers and to help them listen as God speak to them.

Wait on God in silence until someone is ready to pray. When this person prays, the others should listen carefully, both to the prayer itself and to the Holy Spirit. This listening will usually prompt a second person to say something to God, and so on. No one should feel obliged to pray, but if anyone feels that something important has been omitted they should always pray. After a while, the group will probably fall into silence; this is an

opportunity to spend some more time just listening to God. Sometimes one of the group will have something to say, not to God, but from God. If so they should be encouraged to speak out without embarrassment; everyone should listen and respond with prayer.

### **The role of the group leader**

In any group prayer time the role of the leader is very important. Often there will be very little for you to do except decide when it is time to stop. But leaders must be able to recognise when they need to intervene and refocus the group:

- Sometimes in a prayer meeting the focus of the prayers becomes rather negative, with the prayer focussing entirely on problems. Be ready to intervene, drawing the attention of the group back to God and what he is doing. One way of doing this is to lead in a song; another is to read a passage from scripture.
- Sometimes a group is dominated by one or two individuals, with some members remaining silent and not apparently participating. When this happens the leader should stop the prayer, ask each group member in turn to share what they are thinking about. Then invite them each to say a prayer, after which you will all listen to God again.
- If God chooses to speak to the group through one of its members (for example through a word of knowledge, wisdom or prophecy) the leader must be able to evaluate what is said and enable the group to make an appropriate response, even if it is only to thank the person who has shared and ask the others to ponder it.

End by thanking everybody, and make sure you leave enough time for group members to chat to each other before they go back to work or return home.