

May 2012

the **+** helper

The Magazine for Women
Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand



Walking *with* **God**

including

Listening to God

The Discipline of Prayer

Fasting

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Editorial

In the last edition of *The Helper* our theme was learning to trust God when we feel overwhelmed by situations that cause us great fear, worry and anxiety. Nola shared with us the verse from Psalm 23 “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.” What really stood out for Nola was the reason God gives for not being afraid – “**For I am with you**”. Nola wrote, “Trusting in the God who is personally present with us is the key to overcoming fear.” A few weeks later, Nola and her family were called to walk through “the valley of the shadow of death” as Nola’s illness was complicated by a stroke, and humanly speaking it seemed doubtful that she would recover. During this time of crisis, the family have been able to testify to the truth of God’s Word: “When I am afraid, I will trust in you” (Psalm 56:3).

Six months later and Nola’s remarkable progress in her recovery from her illness has meant that she has finally been able to leave hospital and be reunited with Andrew at home and we pray that the Lord may use her new circumstances for His glory. Nola is unable to continue as editor of *The Helper* and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Nola for all the love, care and time she has invested in labouring for the Lord as editor. Nola has a great passion to see women grow in Christ and has been active in encouraging the women in Grace Church to stay connected in fellowship with one another through this magazine and women’s conferences.

For a number of years now, I have been working alongside Nola and the rest of *The Helper* magazine team, and I have been asked to take up the reins as editor. So, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Anne Camp. I am married to Simon and we have three children aged 25, 23 and 15 years. I have always been involved in women’s ministry in the Church and particularly enjoy teaching Bible Study groups for women. I believe that *The Helper* has a special role in encouraging women in God’s word and it is wonderful to celebrate together the way the Lord is working through the many and varied ministries in the church. In this issue of *The Helper* we are focusing on “Walking with

God”. In Genesis we read that Enoch “walked with God” and we learn in the New Testament that he was a man who pleased God and was a preacher of His Word (Hebrews 11:5 and Jude 14&15). So what does it mean to walk with God? Walking with the Lord means we learn to be obedient to God in every aspect of our daily life. James Montgomery Boice in his commentary on Genesis suggests it involves four aspects: (1) Walking by faith in God, and not trusting in our own understanding; (2) Living a holy life because God is holy and calls us to be holy; (3) Agreeing with God on the direction we should go, delighting to walk as God directs; (4) Walking with God is the walk of a lifetime, coming to know God better, day by day.

So what can help us in our walk with God? We have decided to look at some of the time-honoured spiritual disciplines that have helped many generations before us enjoy a closer relationship with God and have perhaps been neglected in more recent years. We appreciate that some of you may have been burnt by overly legalistic views of how to apply the spiritual disciplines and others of you may be discouraged in your Christian faith and wondering if there is anything that can help you grow spiritually as you continually battle sin and feel like you are constantly failing. Our aim is to encourage, inspire and stimulate one another and pray that you will be strengthened in your walk with the Lord.

Many thanks to those who have contributed to this edition and assisted in putting it all together.

On behalf of *The Helper* team,

-Anne Camp

GRACE Ladies

More than a

DUTY³

I was introduced to the spiritual disciplines of daily Bible reading and prayer as a nine year old lad. The wife of our Presbyterian minister had organised an after-school JoyTime Club, and it was while attending this activity I first heard of the value of taking a few moments each day to read the Bible and pray. When we were asked who would like to enrol for Scripture Union Bible reading notes, I was one of the first to put up my hand.

To begin with I applied myself diligently to reading the selected daily Bible portions and explanatory comments. It didn't take long, however, for my enthusiasm to wane. Sometimes I read my Bible, but more often than not I didn't. Bible reading and prayer became tiring duties and a source of guilt, and slowly faded from my life.

Years later the practice revived when I reached university. There I met keen Christians who loved to study the Bible and pray together. Going the rounds at the time was a tract by popular Bible teacher Dr. Stephen Olford called "The Quiet Time." It was an unofficial blueprint for how to go about conducting personal daily devotions, and all good Christian Union members were encouraged to take its counsels to heart.

I was among those who did, and for years set aside time each day to read my Bible devotionally and pray. After we married, my wife Nola was to become a great source of encouragement in this practice. She was an early riser and diligent note-taker and influenced me for good in these ways. From time to time we both benefitted from tips from wise older Christians on how to keep our daily devotions fresh. The years rolled by, our "quiet times" remained, and they still do today.

Both Nola and I realise we are the richer for having developed the disciplines of Bible reading and prayer as part of our lives. We have come to know the Bible in a way that we otherwise wouldn't have and grown in our knowledge and love of God. Our lives have changed as we have lived in daily contact with the Bible and in openness to God. Much of what we have taught and shared with others in Bible studies, theological classrooms and Sunday worship settings over the years has had its roots in our early morning devotions. Yet, our daily quiet times could have been more beneficial. Looking back we see that we often approached them out of a sense of duty, relying on willpower and well-honed method as much as anything. While we never viewed them as empty forms, and still less as meritorious good works, they often fell into a rut of routine activity. There was little sense of meaningful encounter with God and often little spiritual benefit gained.

This has changed as we have grown in our understanding of the gospel. In earlier years our notion of the Christian life was shaped largely by the idea that a believer is a forgiven sinner assured of going to heaven when they die. The emphasis was on what had happened at conversion and what lay ahead beyond death. Everyday living was important, but what really mattered lay in

another realm at another time. While we still believe that forgiveness through faith in the crucified Lord and the hope of eternal glory are central to what it means to be a Christian, we now appreciate that there is much more than that to our new life in Christ. We have come to see that faith unites us to Christ in a way that introduces us to eternal life now. Through Christ, God calls us into his eternal kingdom and makes us participants in a new order of life through the gift of his indwelling Spirit. Having received Christ Jesus as Lord, we believe we are to "continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith... and overflowing with thankfulness" (Colossians 2:6, 7). Being raised with him, we are to "set our hearts and minds on things above" where we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places at his Father's right hand (Colossians 3:1-3). Our everyday lives are to be an expression of an existence anchored in heaven.

In that context our daily devotions have taken on a new character. We no longer approach them as routine spiritual exercises performed out of a sense of duty. Rather, they are a means of focusing our thoughts and hearts upon Jesus and his Father and the unseen spiritual kingdom of which they are the centre. Bible reading and prayer are not ends in themselves, but means by which the Holy Spirit enables us to meet and dwell with the Father and his Son.

Put another way, Nola and I are more aware now that our earthly existence is one that is enveloped by and interactive with an invisible spiritual realm, the kingdom of God. We are called to live not simply out of what we can see, but out of the reality of what is unseen. We do that by faith and not by sight – a faith produced by the Spirit working in us through his Word.

That is what makes daily spiritual disciplines so central to our lives now. Through prayer, reading, study, fasting, journaling, worship and whatever other disciplines prove helpful, we endeavour to have our faith strengthened so that we can approach each day aware of our position in Christ and our calling to live for him and by him in the world. Without these disciplines the unseen

spiritual realm would be less real to us. The world of sight and sense would press upon us and suck us into an existence where we seldom think about God. Through spiritual disciplines, we are better able to stay attuned to him, dependent upon him, and devoted to him.

It would be wrong to give the impression that we succeed in living such a life. There are times when we are joyfully aware of living in vivid companionship with the triune God. But there are hours and even days when, in practical terms, we live as though he does not exist. Gradually, however, as we embrace and practise those spiritual disciplines that help make the spiritual realm more real, we find it increasingly possible to "live by faith in the Son of God" who loved us and gave himself for us (Galatians 2:20).

- Andrew Young

Our everyday lives are to be an expression of an existence anchored in heaven.

Listening to God

Your words were found and I ate them and Your words became to me the joy and the delight of my heart, for I have been called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts. - Jeremiah 15:16

The living God has graciously given His people in all ages His words so that we may know Him, experience His salvation, understand something of His purposes and live in such a way as to bring glory to Him. How did God lead you to discovering His words? What do they mean to you?

An early memory I have of this precious communication from God was a small, black, leather-covered, indexed Bible in a smart new box. It had been given to my granny by her Auntie Annie, when she left England to come to NZ in 1913. Granny and Auntie Annie didn't know that this would be the start of something that would become a joy and a delight to me. I took it carefully to Sunday School where we were given verse tickets as rewards. I began to memorise and underline some of those passages of scripture with red pen in my small black Bible. God's Word was entering and beginning to affect my heart and my life.

At around the same time, in the jungles of Ecuador, God was dramatically bringing His words to the Waodoni people. A converted tribesman involved in the killing of the first group of missionaries who attempted to bring that Word later said, "How could they walk God's trail if they didn't see God's carvings?" "We acted badly until they brought God's carvings. Now seeing His markings and following His trail, we live happily and in peace."¹

God entrusted His Word to Moses to pass it on to His people, so that they and the generations to follow would walk in His ways. In Deuteronomy 6:1-9 the Israelites were told to love God with their whole beings and to have His words on their hearts. Then they could diligently teach them to their children as they sat in their houses, went walking, got into bed and got up again in the mornings. These words were to be like signposts for all their comings and goings, to be in front of them in whatever they were doing individually, as families and as a community of people who were in a covenantal relationship with the one true God.

The psalmist calls God's Word "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). This verse was on many of my Sunday School tickets and has been a major influence in my life. The psalmist says that he walks in its light; he knows its truth, keeps its statutes, treasures and delights in it and meditates on it day and night. The Word of God helps him to be thankful and to keep his way pure, to establish his steps and to help others. Through the Word he knows God's salvation and knows that he is close to God and sustained and shielded by Him.

How can God's words enter our minds and hearts, so that God Himself through His Word directs our walk? "Thy words were found and I ate them" (Jeremiah 15:16) suggests being nourished by the Word as we are with daily food. 1 Peter 2:2 tells Christians to "long for the pure milk of the word so that by it you may grow". Since those early days in Sunday School and the small black Bible which I can no longer read, God has graciously opened His Word to me in wonderful ways. The **Word Hand**ⁱⁱ illustrates what we can do to make sure we get as much of this nourishing food as we can, providing a way to check our diet! **Hearing, reading, studying, and memorizing,** are complemented by **meditating.**



There are many ways to **hear** the Bible, as I found recently on a road trip. The whole Bible is available in several translations on DVD and even on a Christian radio station, beautifully read and perfect for travelling or busy people. The Bible is not an "easy read", however, and it is very important to hear the Scriptures read and taught regularly by someone who knows how to handle "accurately the word of truth" (2Timothy 2:15). Our own personal **reading** of the Word will be enriched as we use notes recommended by our church to aid our understanding.

Hearing

Serious **Bible Study**, as part of a class or a group, has been part of a balanced diet of the Bible for me, but now I can spend more time on it and see the rewards. Our women's weekly group at Covenant Church is studying and discussing together *The Book of Judges* this year. I am growing in my understanding of the history of redemption from such studies. God's people of those days were not so different from us. They too lived in a pluralistic society and like them our own thinking can be subtly influenced by the culture around us. Deep nourishment from the Word of God feeds our hearts and minds with His thinking.

Reading

Memorization was easier in Sunday School days and was a great way to teach my own children. Scriptures memorized in

Studying

those years are brought to mind by the Spirit of God when I most need His rebuke, correction, encouragement, comfort or promise; keeping me on track and close to Him. It may seem harder now to memorize scripture but it is never too late to begin. Different stages in life need new stores to be brought to mind by the Spirit of God and **meditated** on; in the night too, like the psalmist, if that is where you are in your life.

Memorization

Meditation is the process of thinking over what we have heard, read, studied and memorized in such a way as to

Meditation

transfer the words of God deeply into our hearts affecting our lives. As we meditate and pray over God's Word, His Spirit teaches us what we need to learn and how we must change. Without this our intake of the Bible is only shallow and easily forgotten.

God has promised to teach us as we diligently give attention to His Word. The risen Lord Jesus Christ opened up the Scriptures to the disciples who walked with Him on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24). Jesus promised His disciples that the Spirit of Truth would come after His ascension to teach and to guide them, to be with them and in them (John 14:15-17; 16:13).

God made this promise to His people through Isaiah: *"As for me, this is my covenant with them, says the LORD: 'My Spirit which is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring' says the LORD from now and forever"* (Isaiah 59:21). In commenting on this passage E.J. Young said: "The LORD is declaring that His eternal truth, revealed to man in words, is the peculiar possession of His people...Today the treasure of the Church is the Holy Scripture, the Word that cannot be broken, inerrant and infallible, the very truth of the eternal God. This Word and Spirit will never depart from the Church, for the Church is to declare the truth to all nations...that the saving health of God may be seen by all." ⁱⁱⁱ

Food with which God nourishes our lives, markings which show us His trail, a treasured possession to share, the delight of our hearts; are some of these pictures of God's Word meaningful to you? Is this how we regard God's Word in our churches and in our personal lives? Through its light are we glorifying and enjoying God Himself and daily walking in the ways He has purposed for those who are called by His Name?

- Lesley Flinn
Covenant Presbyterian Church

ⁱ Steve Saint, End of the Spear. Salt River: Tyndale House Publications, pps 59, 329.

ⁱⁱ The Word Hand. Used by permission of The Navigators. Copyright 1964, all rights reserved. www.navpress.com.

ⁱⁱⁱ Edward J. Young, Commentary on the Book of Isaiah: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Booklist

Books

Kay Arthur	Lord Teach Me to Pray
Jerram Barrs	The Heart of Prayer
Arthur Bennett	The Valley of Vision
Kenneth Boa	Face to Face (2 volumes on prayer)
E. M. Bounds	The Necessity of Prayer (& many others in the series)
D.A. Carson	For the love of God (devotional aid)
Nancy Leigh DeMoss	30 day walk with God in the Psalms
Elyse Fitzpatrick	A Steadfast Heart: Experiencing God's comfort in Life's Storms
Elizabeth George	A Woman's Call to Prayer
Barbara Hughes	Disciplines of a Godly Woman
Susan Hunt	Prayers of the Bible
Douglas Kelly	If God Already Knows, Why Pray?
J.I. Packer / C. Nystrom	Praying
Martha Peace	Attitudes of a Transformed Heart
Richard Pratt	Pray with Your Eyes Open
Carol Ruvolo	Before the Throne of God
Philip Ryken	When you Pray: Making the Lord's Prayer Your Own
Edith Schaeffer	The Life of Prayer
R. C. Sproul & R. Wolgemuth	What's in the Bible?
Donald Whitney	Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life 10 Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health

Articles

"How to Pray for the Soul – Yours or Another" by John Piper www.desiringgod.org

Series of articles on prayer – www.redeemer.com enter "Prayer Resources" in search box

Useful Websites

(for Daily Devotionals or resources on prayer)

www.livingchristtoday.com

www.christcommunity.org (Pastor Scotty Smith Daily Prayers)

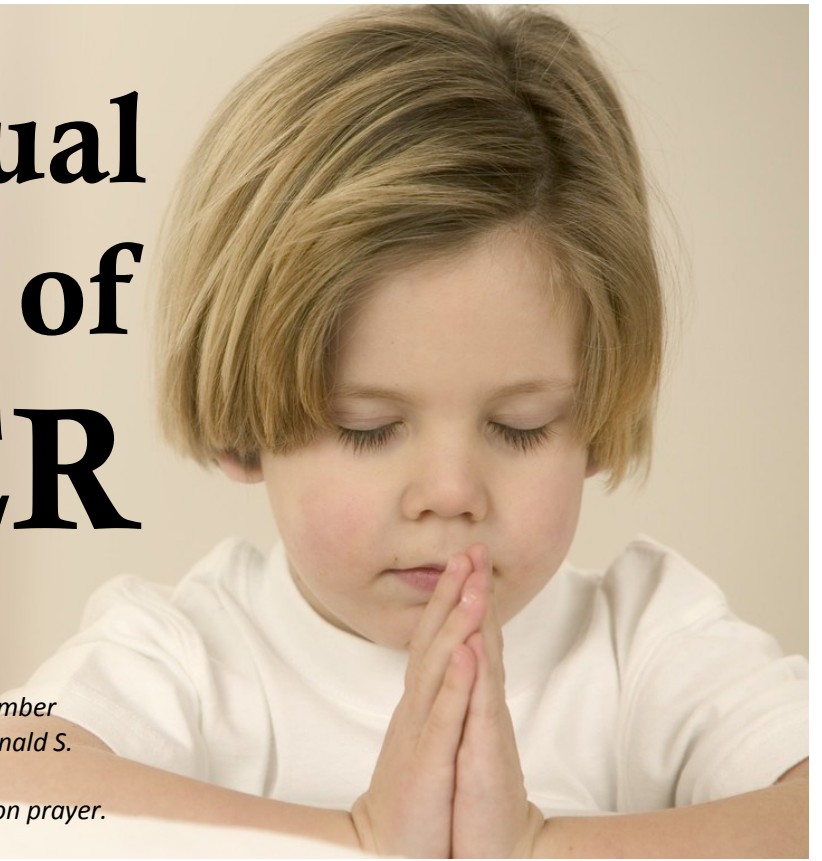
www.ligonier.org

www.reviveourhearts.com

www.girltalkhome.com

www.ewordtoday.com

The Spiritual Discipline of PRAYER



*This article first appeared in "Faith in Focus" (September 2003) as part of a series reviewing and applying Donald S. Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Additional insights are from Don Carson's writings on prayer.*

Martin Luther once wrote: "As it is the business of tailors to make clothes and cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray." God expects us to pray: the Lord's Prayer, as it came from Jesus' lips, is full of expressions *assuming* that we will pray, rather than urging us to do it. Of course, it ought to be a natural aspect of our lives as Christians. Prayer is spiritual conversation with our Father in heaven. We are in a spiritual relationship with Him. Don't we speak to all those we have human relationships with? It is the expectation of love. And it's the same with God.

Donald Whitney is at his practical best when he discusses prayer and its place in our lives as a spiritual discipline. But you might ask - why should prayer be a spiritual "discipline" when, after all, talking is as easy as breathing? The answer lies in a simple fact. Christians don't pray. Or, at least, only a fraction as much as they should. When Paul commanded us to "pray without ceasing"¹ he didn't mean the 5 minutes a day that was the average time 17,000 members of major evangelical denominations surveyed in the U.S. in the 1980s spent in prayer. Sadly, many Christians seem to forget to pray at all - for long periods. Perhaps we are not even as good as the 17,000 surveyed 20 years ago? Whitney knows what we're like - he's a pastor - and he's concerned that we look honestly at our shortcomings and the reasons for them. Only then will we actually do something about them.

The first reason Whitney gives for lack of prayer is a lack of discipline in our lives. Purposeless, drifting days mean important things are not done. If prayer is not planned it gets crowded out by urgencies and distractions. Whitney does give other reasons Christians don't pray (such as doubt that anything will happen, an absence of awareness of God's presence, no awareness of need). But I somehow suspect that such thoughts have little impact on people who have spent their lives hearing good preaching. No, I fear that lack of discipline is the major reason we don't pray as we should.

How many times have you got up in the morning and determined to read the Scriptures, and to pray - for 10 minutes or so? You manage the Bible reading, but as you turn to prayer your mind wanders. Better put the jug on for coffee... will I have toast or cereal for breakfast this morning? And then a magazine article catches your eye... the telephone rings... someone calls out a question from another room. Before you know it, it's time to go to work, or get the children out of bed. You didn't manage to pray - *again*. The world, the flesh and the devil, in the form of countless distractions, will strive together to keep us from it.

But there is a lot that we can do to arrest our habits of mental drift, to get ourselves closeted, alone and praying. These practical steps add up to spiritual discipline. Don Carson recommends vocalising our prayer to stamp out daydreaming. We don't have to be loud - even just murmuring or whispering our prayer is enough to discipline the mind and keep it from wandering. I think this works (I've tried it) because it enlists the help of our ears. Because we *hear* what we're saying, we can more easily order our thoughts and pay attention to the choice of words and phrases.

The second thing we can do is pray over or through the Scriptures. After careful and reflective reading of your Bible, turn your reflections and applications into prayers. Prayers of thanks and wonder for what He has done; prayers of supplication that He will help you do what the passage teaches; prayers of intercession that He will do for others as He has for you; prayers of confession of the sin described in the passage. If you found the passage difficult to understand you could pray for the Holy Spirit's illuminating help as you read it again and as you meditate on it during the day. Another way of praying through the Scriptures is to adopt biblical prayers as models. Read them carefully, think through what they are saying, and then pray similar prayers for yourself, your family, your church - and for others beyond your immediate circle.

Journaling is another good way to concentrate our minds for prayer. The act of writing down our praying thoughts to God slows us down, forces us to think about the words we are using, and enables us to clarify the muddle that might be going on in our mind. Have you ever found yourself frustrated at not being able to express yourself clearly in an important discussion? Perhaps you said – let me go away and write down what I mean – it'll come out better. The same process of writing can help us express ourselves better to God. Normally we picture prayer as ourselves sitting quietly, communicating with God in our thoughts. But writing our prayers as we pray them has great value – not only in terms of focus and clarity, but also because we can remember them. Reading them over, days, months or years later can be truly encouraging. It will help us realise that we faced trials before – and we took them to our Father, who comforted us. We had joys and triumphs – and we thanked Him for those. We asked Him for help, for relief from suffering – and He answered our prayers. This will encourage our faith, and give us every reason to pray again and again.

Another reason some of us are discouraged about our prayers is the sense that we don't know how to pray very well. This can really get us down and be a real disincentive to pray in public. Maybe you've always avoided going to prayer meetings because you're embarrassed about your praying? Well, here Don Whitney is a great deal of help. Prayer, he emphasizes, is something we learn, and get better at doing. So, how do we learn to pray? Whitney's most important point is that we learn to pray by *praying*. Just as we learn another language best by having to speak it, we learn prayer most quickly and effectively by praying; frequently, and in every circumstance. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts who helps us to pray, and He guides us in our prayer better when we are actually praying – rather than simply thinking about it. By praying often we gain confidence in prayer as a habit, as a reflex response to good news, to bad news, to joy, fear, doubt, and confusion – whatever our situation may be. The more we pray the more fluent and persuasive our prayers will be.

There are also specific helps in learning prayer that can make a real difference to our prayer lives. The foremost of these is studying Scripture. This is not only to find in Scripture the things we ought to be praying about – but also to instruct us on the subject of prayer. Scripture teaches us why we should pray. Have you ever doubted whether we should pray, given that God knows all things and will sovereignly bring to pass His perfect will anyway? Or, on the other hand, have you ever been burdened by the fear that things haven't happened as they should have because you neglected to pray – that God's actions depend on your faithfulness in prayer? Don Carson explains that Scripture, taken as a whole, shows us how to avoid these two wrong attitudes to prayer. God *is* utterly sovereign, and He is also a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. If we pray with the knowledge the Bible gives us, we will not “wobble back and forth between a resigned fatalism that asks for nothing and a badgering desperation that exhibits little real trust.”ⁱⁱ

Scripture also teaches us how to pray by showing us the character, purposes and promises of God. If we know what the God to whom we pray is like, and what His wishes are, we will certainly know how to pray for the things that He wants – that please Him. And if we know what He has promised, we can

pray for those things with certainty and confidence that He will hear us, and answer those prayers.

The language of Scripture also gives us ideas, words and phrases with which to pray. This isn't just stringing quotations of Scripture together as we construct our prayers (although sometimes that is not such a bad idea). But as our knowledge of Scripture grows, and as our minds and hearts are increasingly filled with it and changed by study of it, we will find our prayer becoming deeper and more varied. Carson (commenting on Psalm 135) notices that as the psalmist “builds his exuberant hymn of praise, consciously or unconsciously he interweaves phrase after phrase, sometimes whole verses, drawn from other Scriptures.” This used to be the way evangelical Christians prayed. As they “poured out their hearts to the Lord in prayer meetings,” Carson observes, “both praise and petition were cast in the language of Scripture. Of course, at its worst this sort of thing was a canned recitation of the same half-dozen texts. But at its best, such praise and prayer roamed through ever-wider vistas of Scripture, as the people's knowledge of Scripture was itself growing. There is something mature and biblically evocative about such praise, and as different from today's narrow themes of clichéd sentimentalism as Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is from Mary Had a Little Lamb.”

We can also learn a great deal about prayer by praying with more mature Christians. One may teach us how to use biblical reasoning in our prayer as he pleads with God to answer his prayer. Another may show you how to pray through a passage you have just been meditating on. Yet others may simply set us a great example in the frequency, persistence and genuine faithfulness of their habits of prayer. Carson urges us to seek good models for prayer – not just so we can ape their idiom, but so we can study their content and their urgency. We need to look for people who are experienced in prayer, who pray with wisdom, conviction, urgency and love. But obviously, we won't find them unless we are regularly praying with others – and talking with them about prayer. When was the last time you met with someone for prayer, went to a church prayer meeting – or had a serious conversation on the subject of prayer? These are the only ways we will find a personal model who will teach us how to pray.

And this takes us back to the beginning of the circle: prayer is a spiritual discipline. It needs to be planned, practised and learned. To be sure, it should be as natural to the Christian who loves her God as breathing: but given our sinful natures there will be many things to distract us from it, which will stifle our spiritual breath. Prayer *is* one of the hardest things we have to do - if we do it properly. But there is every encouragement: we have the Holy Spirit, who helps us in this, as in all our weaknesses.

-Sally Davey

(Sally belongs to the Reformed Churches of New Zealand and writes regularly for their “Faith n Focus” Magazine)

ⁱ 1 Thessalonians 5:17

ⁱⁱ Carson, *Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 31

ⁱⁱⁱ Carson, *For the Love of God*, Vol.1, July 4



A neglected discipline

people of Israel also fasted when they were *seeking God's guidance*, when they were *fighting temptation* or when they wanted to express their *worship and praise*.

The common thread to these various types of fasts and reasons for fasting was an intense spiritual concern. This is what was missing in much of Jewish fasting in Jesus' day.

The negative command

In Matthew 6:16 Jesus warns us against religious showmanship. "When you fast do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting." Jesus is warning us against spiritual pride, against showing off. The hypocrites wanted others to notice they were fasting. They would 'disfigure' their faces by not combing their hair and beard and by colouring their face so as to look pale. They tried to look hungry so as to appear to be holy! Jesus condemns this. Fasting was supposed to be an aid to personal devotion and an act of humility before God; but the Jews had turned it on its head and used it as a display of their righteousness. Jesus says, "They have received their reward in full". They got what they wanted which was the praise of men.

The positive command

Jesus says, "But when you fast put oil on your head and wash your face so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting (Matthew 6:17-18a). With these words Jesus is not suggesting you go to the other extreme. Don't go over the top and be extra happy and boisterous. If you do that you are still drawing attention to yourself. When you fast just act normally; follow your usual routines; do your usual things; have a shave, shower and wash your hair. Don't act as if you are fasting.

Fasting is between you and the Lord and when you fast God will reward you. "Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (vs 18b). This doesn't mean that God will automatically give us what we are asking for. Fasting is not a spiritual hunger strike that will force God to do what you want him to do. Fasting is an expression of your intense concern about something. And God will answer that in His way and in His time.

So how does fasting apply to us?

The first application we should note is that fasting is a **Christian practice**. Now you might want to argue that this doesn't apply to us at all — that fasting is an Old Testament regulation and practice. There is only one fast commanded in the Old Testament and that is in connection with the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:26ff). On that day the people were to "deny themselves"; that is, to fast. That fast was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ and in His sacrifice on the cross. It was

Probably many of you have never heard a sermon on fasting. It isn't part of many church traditions. In fact, it has been widely neglected by most of the church in the western world for a few hundred years.

Initially, that neglect was perhaps an over-reaction to the excesses and abuses of fasting in the Roman Catholic Church. More recently the neglect of fasting is more because we live in a very self-indulgent and undisciplined society. People are not used to denying themselves anything at all - so fasting goes against the grain in our present culture.

What is fasting?

Fasting as a practice is so unfamiliar to us today. The word 'fast' appears in our word "breakfast"; during the night you go without food and in the morning you "break-your-fast". In this case you fast because you are asleep! People might go without food for other reasons as well: to be mentally alert, to lose weight or to be healthy. But biblical fasting is not the ultimate crash diet to lose weight! In the Bible fasting is the *voluntary denial of food for a spiritual purpose*. It is to go without food to express a spiritual concern.

There are various **types of fasts** described in the Bible. Sometimes people went without food and water (Ezra 10:6, Acts 9:9), although mostly people went without food but still drank water (Matthew 4:2). In other cases people restricted their diet in some way; they ate less than normal or they ate simple meals (Daniel 10:3 cf. 1:12). People could fast by missing one meal, or by fasting for one day, three days, a week or even forty days. People could also fast on their own as individuals, a private fast (as described in Matthew 6), or they could fast as group of people, as a city, a congregation or a small group.

There were also different **reasons why people fasted**. God's people in the Bible fasted in *times of great need*. We read of that in Esther chapter 4. All the Jews fasted and prayed for three days in a time of intense need when they were under great threat. Fasting in the Bible is often connected with a *confession of sin*. People had such a strong sense of their sin before God that they repented with prayer and fasting. We read a striking example of this in Jonah where the king and his nobles issued a decree calling the whole Assyrian city of Nineveh to fast and put on sackcloth (Jonah 3:5-9). The

completed in him and so we don't have to keep that one. Yet, as we have seen from the examples already mentioned, the Jews fasted on other occasions as well. There are many examples of regular fasts as well as fasts called for special situations. But fasting is mentioned in the New Testament as well. There is no New Testament command to fast, but again we have plenty of examples of Christians who did fast. In verse 16 Jesus is not commanding his disciples to fast but he does assume that there will be times when they will do so; "When you fast..." It is put in the same category as giving to the needy (vs 2) and prayer (vs 5). "When you give to the needy..."; "When you pray..."

So, fasting has been a longstanding practice in the Old and New Testament times and in the history of the church. So it is surprising that it has fallen into disuse. Yet it's not so surprising when you think that this is a **spiritual discipline**. We live, as I said earlier, in self-indulgent and undisciplined times.

We expect to have our desires immediately satisfied, our pains taken away, our illnesses cured, our injuries healed, our hunger satisfied. From that point of view it's hardly surprising that fasting has gone out of fashion because we are not used to self-control and discipline and waiting. But this is a good reason to reintroduce this practice, because we need every encouragement and help to live disciplined lives. Fasting teaches us to control our bodies. It teaches us that our body should be ruled by our mind and will, and it helps us to practice this.

Fasting also **encourages earnestness**. When we face a crisis or a problem in the church we form a committee or we hold extra meetings. But in biblical times when believers faced a crisis or a calamity they *fasted*. They fasted when they felt strongly about something; about their sin, their need for help or guidance or forgiveness or comfort. It expressed their deep need and concern. This is a biblical pattern. You might want to fast when you are beginning a new job, or about to start university, or when you are struggling with temptation,

or in preparation for the Lord's Supper, or out of concern for your families and friends who do not know Christ, or when the church is facing a crisis, or when your marriage or family are in trouble. Maybe you will decide to miss breakfast, or morning tea, or lunch, or all three. Next time you feel strongly about some matter that you want to bring before God then you should consider prayer and fasting.

Finally, **fasting keeps us focused**. Most of us really love food! And God wants us to enjoy the good things of his creation. He even commanded the people of Israel to get together at times for a big feast — a great party! The writer of Ecclesiastes tells us; "There is a time of everything and a season for every activity under heaven" (3:1). There is a time to feast and a time to fast. Abstaining from food helps focus your mind and your attention. God has made us so that our mind and body and spirit are all connected together. One affects the other. If you eat too much you will feel lazy and sleepy. If you don't eat anything you feel hungry. But that hunger can help focus your mind and remind you to pray.

There are no New Testament commands to fast. And so there are no instructions about how often you should fast or for how long. This must never be turned into a legalistic or mechanical routine. Nor must it be done for the wrong motive - for the praise of men or our own pride. Nor should we judge one another - either for their fasting or their lack of it.

But here in Matthew 6 Jesus assumes that we will not only be giving to the needy and praying but that we will also be fasting; that we will fast as a spiritual discipline, according to our own conscience, in response to what is going on in our life and the church, as an aid in the life of being a disciple of Christ, and for the benefit of our relationship with God.

- John Haverland,
Pukekohe Reformed Church

(This is a copy of a sermon preached by John Haverland in December, 2006. Used with permission.)

Spiritual Check-Up

Donald Whitney has a useful little book called *"Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health"*. He offers ten "tests" to assess your *true* state of spiritual well-being, evaluate your growth in areas that matter, and deepen your relationship with Christ.

- Do you thirst for God?
- Are you governed increasingly by God's Word?
- Are you more loving?
- Are you more sensitive to God's presence?
- Do you have a growing concern for the spiritual and temporal needs of others?
- Do you delight in the bride of Christ?
- Are the spiritual disciplines increasingly important to you?
- Do you still grieve over sin?
- Are you a quick forgiver?
- Do you yearn for heaven and to be with Jesus?

Whitney devotes one chapter to each question and explores how we can develop in each of these areas and gives practical suggestions of how we can improve. You could study this book in a small group or with a friend.

Surviving Spiritually with Pre

We asked three young Mums from the Grace Churches to share with us some helpful tips on how they make time for spiritual encouragement during the busy and challenging time of parenting pre-schoolers.

Jennifer Milton

GPC Christchurch



What I will share are things that I have found helpful as I have muddled through these early years with having children. I have never done it perfectly and have only sometimes done it well. I think an important aspect of spiritually surviving these years is realizing that you'll never ever have it all together. Sometimes you'll sail along, but usually you'll have to make a conscious effort to remain focused on the Lord and Scriptures. Here are a few ideas:

Make time with God a priority

I wish I could say there was a shortcut, a quick and easy fix, a tablet or potion that worked godliness in us. The only way to be more like God is to spend time with God, learn about God and love God. The way we become what we hope to be, is to allow God to mold us through the power of His Word and Spirit, who together convict of sin and promise to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Practically what this looks like is getting up earlier or making sacrifices in your day to make time. It's a discipline, and one that can be cultivated over time. Sit with the Lord, worship Him for who He is and then ask the Giver of all good

things to teach you, work in you and change you. He will!

Don't bow out

Mums can have a tendency to feel that we don't have time to attend Bible studies, camps or even sit through a church service because we convince ourselves that our families need us. We have to remember that they will survive without us! We must take time out to be spiritually fed. Go to a Bible study. Let your littlies go to crèche or be held by a willing friend (even if they cry) while you go back to church. Don't be afraid to go away to a camp or conference for a day, overnight or even a whole weekend so you can be spiritually nourished and have a rest. This spiritual renewal will have long-lasting effects on you and subsequently on your family.

Get a spiritual companion besides your husband

If you don't have a girlfriend who is spiritually mature enough, then don't be afraid to ask someone you respect. This person could be someone to mentor you, or just a peer who is willing to pray with and for you, and be a listening ear when you have bad days.

Exercise

Getting out in fresh air with sunshine, or even rain can be so rejuvenating that it gives us the pick up we need to continue our day with greater joy. Throw the kids in the pram for a walk, get up early for a jog or stroll, join an exercise class with a friend. Do something active to get your blood pumping because it really does make us happier and lift us spiritually. Take your kids to the park and get on the equipment with them, or get on the ground with them and play. All this activity and fun is good for you and them. Especially, don't forget to laugh! Have fun; enjoy the blessings of those sticky faces, toothless grins and messiness. These days are like vapor, so let us make the most of what God has given us for this day!

Gina Young

Trinity Church, Takanini



It is easy to be distracted from reading the Bible and learning more about God. It is extra easy to be side-tracked when you have a 24/7 job – being a Mum. Having a 'quiet time' to read your Bible sounds ridiculous when you don't even get the luxury of a quiet 30 seconds to go to the toilet by yourself!

The Bible though is important in every part of our lives. If we want to be able to do our 24/7 work we need to learn more of the Bible, not wait till our 24/7 job gives us a break. Ways of learning more from the Bible that have worked for me include: going to church every Sunday, family devotions, personal devotions, church coffee group and women's church events.

Going to church is great, but can be a mission with a toddler. We take a survival kit. Contents include: kiddy offering, biscuits, kiddy bible, biscuits, drink bottle, nappies, biscuits, pens, paper, clipboard and crayons with biscuits. Our church has a sound speaker out the back so I can still listen to the sermon on days that eating, reading, singing and drawing aren't enough to result in quiet. Every week I learn something and sometimes drawing sermon notes at a three-year-old level actually helps my concentration.

At home my husband reads a story from a children's Bible with Liam and I after tea. Then we pray and sing (the novelty of 'if I were a butterfly' wears off after the 400th time – but only for the adults).

eschoolers

Even though the level of the story is for little kids, the words are still true for me.

I don't get up to do my devotions early in the morning. If my son is sleeping through the night I like to make the most of it and do the same. It suits me to read my Bible in the afternoon. Although my son no longer has a sleep every day, he has a 'rest' in his room for a little while after lunch. It's much easier to concentrate without him.

Over the summer holidays our coffee group did a Bible reading plan. It helped keep me going knowing that other busy Mums were working through their plan too. They have more kids than me so I had no excuse for getting behind! Doing the devotion for coffee group helps too – there is nothing like a deadline to get me motivated. Since we started printing out our study material I can't even wing it on the day. A big thank you to my friends from coffee group! You keep me honest in learning more about the Bible every week even when every day doesn't happen.

Once a year we get together with women from the other Grace Churches in Auckland and listen to a speaker. It's a great time to learn lots all in one day and keeps me going for ages. The very best part is the crèche – we can drop off our kids and listen without distractions.

God has used my family and church family to help me learn more about the Bible, even in busy times. I hope you have found some ways that work for you too.



Janina Muriwai

Trinity Church, Takanini



When I glance back to when I was 18, life seemed so simple – so much freedom, so little responsibility, so much TIME! It was easy getting into the Word and praying. The thought of having my own family was a romantic idea. Nine years on and you find me at home, unromantically run off my feet with a hardworking husband, two young boys and a 13 year old girl. But, I wouldn't trade it for anything. It has been in this busiest, noisiest stage of my life that I've drawn closer than ever before to my Heavenly Father. Why? God took my eyes off myself and fixed them on Him. It has become a daily surrender of my will and desires to His love, grace and plan for my life. This is still not an easy road for my stubborn heart, but here is what I've learnt so far.

God's taught me that He never promised that I would have freedom in my life from pain, busyness or tiredness, or that my kids would be easy and my husband would just work 9 to 5. But, because of Jesus' resurrection, I can have freedom from anger, bitterness, frustration and worry. He will never leave me nor forsake me, and His grace is sufficient for all my needs. He's also taught me that all self-salvation projects are futile. We form a checklist in our mind, and either point out to God all the boxes we've ticked so He'll do what we want, or we feel condemned because we're too tired or busy to do everything on the list. Instead, God's taught me that Jesus plus nothing equals everything.

So, practically, what to do? Get up at 5am and read and pray for an hour? If

you can, you are either superwoman or you don't have kids! Start by throwing out the checklist. God is not a school teacher; He's your Father and you are in a living, dynamic, relationship with Him. Be connected to Jesus from the start of your day through to the end. As your first alarm clock calls out to you (whichever kid it may be) let them wait an extra 30 seconds and say good morning to Jesus. Make it a habit to talk to God as you hang the washing, wash the dishes or sit waiting in the car outside the school gates. Ask God to show you moments when you can read. I've learnt to put the kids in their rooms with a good cd playing and a pile of books or toys, tell them mummy is spending the next half hour with Jesus, and close the door. I am learning to say no to chores, or other things that are screaming my name. They can wait.

Unplug! If you can facebook, tweet or youtube you can find time to spend with God. Meet up with a godly mum. It's hard when you're so busy, but do keep it up, for there is nothing like the sweet fellowship and confidence of someone who has already been there.

Surround yourself with the Word. I keep a Bible in my handbag, an A3 memory verse board in the lounge, a Bible app on my phone. Make it work for you. I've also been helped recently by other books. Here's a quote from *Real Marriage* by Mark and Grace Driscoll; "Anytime the order of godly (1) woman, (2) wife, (3) mother, (4) friend gets switched we commit idolatry and end up in misery." So easy to switch!

Finally, remember God made you. He knows you inside out. He knows you are tired and weary. But His grace is sufficient for you. So let's stop running round in circles, keep our eyes on the Shepherd and follow His voice!

"He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."
Isaiah 40:11

Walking with God together

Have you ever longed for a friend with whom you could share deeply of the joys and struggles of life and talk openly and honestly about your spiritual walk? Or maybe you have been in a crisis or endured a long period of suffering and as you look back on those times you realise that if it wasn't for the wider body of Christ supporting and encouraging you, you might have "sunk" under the pressure of it all.

The Christian life was never meant to be one that we walk alone. God created us to be relational creatures and to live in communities, sharing the love of Christ with others and helping each other to grow and mature in our faith. The Scriptures remind us of the importance of sharing life together. Proverbs 27:17 says "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says "Two are better than one, because they have a better return for their work; if one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"

When I was expecting our second child, I had a very difficult pregnancy and was constantly in danger of going into premature labour. This meant I was largely confined to the house and was unable to do regular chores or care for the family. We had to have live-in help for the last three months of the pregnancy, and it was not easy, at 25 years old, to be so incapacitated and I had to learn to graciously accept the help of others to cook and clean for us. My husband was at theological college and working part-time jobs to support the family and this was definitely a time

when we felt like we were "falling down". As I look back on that experience, I am profoundly grateful for another young mum who made it a priority to come and visit me once a fortnight to study a passage of scripture with me while our toddlers played together. I was spending so much time on bed rest, and the Lord had taught me that this was a good opportunity to pray for others, but I also needed to be nourished in the faith with God's word and I longed for fellowship with another women. Meeting with another mum to study and pray together was like a spiritual lifeline that helped me grow through that time of crisis.

Another huge encouragement to me in my Christian walk has been a spiritual friendship with a woman much older than myself. At 18 years old I was living in a new city, attending a new university and newly married to my husband who was training to be a pastor! The Lord had given me a hunger and thirst to know the scriptures better and I figured if I was going to be a pastor's wife I would need to develop a deeper relationship with God and be able to encourage others. I set out to find a small group that was serious about studying the Bible together. There was a ladies' Bible study group at church and so I went along. They were all about 20 years older than me, but lovingly welcomed me into the group and taught me much about how to study the Word and pray together. One of these ladies has kept in touch with me for the last 30 years, regularly praying for me and sharing books and articles. But the greatest encouragement has come from

being able to share deeply from the heart, the joys and the sorrows of life and the doubts and struggles involved in the Christian life. At times of great difficulty — the loss of a baby, experiencing depression and at one time walking through a period of deep doubt and despair — it has been this friend who has encouraged me the most and ministered deeply to my soul. And all of this has been done over the telephone or in letters! We haven't lived near each other for 25 years and have only met together in person twice during that time. This has truly been a relationship that reflects the "spiritual mothering" relationship that is taught in Titus 2:3-5 and is so important to women.

As we journey through life together, experiencing the joys and the difficulties, we need the company of others who are willing to spur us on to love and good deeds. We need those who will speak the truth to us, to encourage and exhort, and sometimes to just draw alongside us and say nothing at all but walk beside us in a time of grief or sorrow. Maybe you long for someone with whom you can share the struggles of the Christian life. Pray to the Lord and ask him to lead you to someone with whom you can pray and study together and be honest about what the Lord is doing in your heart. Reaching out to others can sometimes be a risky business, but the blessings and encouragements are tremendous. I highly recommend it!

- Anne Camp
Covenant Presbyterian Church

Praying for your children

You may find it helpful to make a card for each of your children (maybe with a photo at the top) with the following headings. Fill in detailed petitions under each heading. Ephesians 3:16-18 and Ephesians 1:18-19 can aid your praying.

**Spirituality
Protection**

**Character
Problems**

**Friends
Future Spouse**

**Health
Praise**

(This suggestion comes from "Making a family prayer list" in the book "Common Sense Parenting" by Kent and Barbara Hughes.)



It was April 2011 and Grace Church Dunedin was set to invest big money in our family. They had made provision for my husband, Mark, to take sabbatical for three months and were willing to send our entire family to the USA, where we would be based at Briarwood for 10 weeks. The investment was huge, and I was feeling it. Could a bedraggled mother and her four children, aged nine and under, be worth investing so much in? While grateful to accompany Mark, I was overwhelmed. And so I prayed. I prayed that God would make every cent worth it, that He would use this time to grow me as well as my family. Well, God says "whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." (John 16:23-24) The answer to this prayer was a trip of personal challenge, growth and insight that I see as God-given for my joy.

The absolute highlight of this time of growth was the PCA National Women's Conference, Amazing Grace, held in Atlanta, Georgia. I walked into the massive conference centre in Atlanta, alone and late. Over 1000 women were already seated at the pre-conference lunch. I grabbed my lunch from the front table and began wandering, looking for a space. Several tables along some sisters in Christ made room at their table. Motor biking Grandma and friend were delighted that their new table guest was in fact an import from far away and delighted to know what God was doing in NZ! From that moment on God provided many different people to chat to and learn from.

I was struck by the passion of the teachers at this conference; women who boldly stood up and proclaimed God's word, who have a passion for Christ, who have known suffering and yet it has grown in them a deep dependence on God. Nancy Guthrie, was the main speaker. This passionate, humorous, woman taught with conviction from a heart that knows what it is like to bury two of her children by the age of 6 months. She has a deep passion for going deep into God's word and for growing women in Christ. When a panel she was in was asked about recommended books to get women to read, Nancy was quick to suggest, "the Bible, Calvin, the Puritans". Laura Story, songwriter from

Perimeter Church known for writing the words to 'Indescribable', led worship one night. As she took the stage her passion for Christ in the midst of suffering, that of walking alongside her husband as he has battled a brain tumor shone through. Through pain and suffering these women were drawing near to God and now He is using that to reach out to others.

The conference also had several smaller seminars on topical issues. The seminar that had the biggest impact on me was Women in Crisis. It challenged us to think through how we minister to women, who for whatever reason are facing a time of crisis in their faith. We looked at how to recognise a woman in crisis. As Debbe Mays pointed out they don't always come crying. They might be the ones who come, smile, answer us politely, talk about the weather and quietly slip away; a perfect mask for a devastated heart. Then we were challenged to think through what we can be doing to help point these women to what they really need in their crisis: God, "the Father of Mercies and God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). There were many good points in this seminar, but I was left with the challenge of how are we equipping the women in our church to point each other to Jesus in their times of crisis, or are we leaving them alone, or to the elders and professionals to deal with? As women we are constantly giving each other advice. Is the advice we are giving pointing to Jesus? The fruit of this seminar is a new book club at Grace Dunedin. A small group of women meet monthly as we work through books together that are designed to equip us helping women renew or find their hope in Christ.

The final delight of the weekend was the 'Faces of Grace', celebrating God's grace and the fruit of the Gospel in women who describe themselves as ordinary pilgrims. This was an evening of testimony from women who make up the PCA women's ministry; those who first had the vision for women being equipped in the Word to those today who are the ordinary yet extraordinary faces of the ministry. It was a delight to witness in one night a bigger picture of what God has done and is doing in this ministry.

I came away glowing, I am sure, challenged to grow and seek God more and also challenged that the vision of a few women in the PCA back in the late '70's, which they committed to God, had grown into this vibrant mass of women. Many of them were the women's ministry leaders in their church, being refreshed and equipped to go back to their ministries both big and small. My mind was alive with ideas, but most of all I was encouraged to seek God more. This alone made every bit of investment in our trip seem worth it. May God work in GPCNZ to grow women passionate to know God more, passionate for His Word, and passionate to make Him known.

- Jess Smith
Grace Church, Dunedin

In Brief

News & Prayer Points from around the Country

While not all our congregations feature in this edition, please still be faithful in praying for them in their work of the Kingdom as well as those listed below. We trust you are encouraged by what you read, gain new ideas for what would also work for you, and are helped to pray more effectively for each location.

Northern Presbytery

MANGERE

Providence Presbyterian Church

This year Providence ladies are studying Nancy Leigh de Moss's book *Lies Women Believe and the Truth that sets them Free*. We had an evening meeting to watch part of her video and then we are meeting once a month on a Sunday morning prior to church to study the issues raised in her book. Please pray that this group will grow in numbers and in their knowledge and love of the Lord.

Our playgroup outreach is off to a good start this year with 18 children enrolled and sometimes 10-12 mums attending sessions. It runs every morning Monday to Friday, with Megan Levi leading it. It has expanded to include cooking most mornings, where recipes and skills are shared and taught. Also, once a week an exercise session is held, with Josh Levi as their personal trainer. This is working well and some of the families are coming to our Saturday morning bootcamp outreach and some families have also worshipped with us. Please pray for Megan particularly as she becomes more and more involved in the lives of these young mothers.

Providence is also in the process of applying to build a preschool on the property and has negotiated a lease with the Reformed Church. Pray that the Ministry of Education will grant this application and that it would meet needs and reach out further to those in our surrounding neighbourhood.

Give thanks for the many contacts being made in the community. Pray for all who are involved in leadership and outreach in our church as the harvest is plentiful but workers are few.

MANUREWA

Covenant Presbyterian Church

- Give thanks for the Music and More group that meets fortnightly and for the many new mums and children who are coming along.
- Pray for the new Bible Study group for young mums starting in term two. This will be a fortnightly study that will study topics of particular interest to women. Pray that many of the music and more mums would be encouraged to come along and feel welcome.
- Give thanks for the Spiritual Mothering groups that are meeting monthly. Pray for grace and wisdom for the leaders, and that the ladies would encourage one another in their walk with the Lord.

Central Presbytery

ASHBURTON

Evangelical Presbyterian Church

- Pray that we would welcome and enfold well the new ladies in our church.
- Pray for our Ladies' Bible Study, that we may continue to benefit from meeting and studying together.
- Pray for our *Tots and Tunes* group as we reach out to other mothers.

CHRISTCHURCH

Grace Presbyterian Church

Term One seems to have flown by. We have completed a term of 'Journey' studies on Sunday mornings before church and Growth Groups on weeknights. The two very different meetings cater for extra discipleship-type studies on Sundays and fellowship during the week. Ladies (and others) are enjoying these opportunities.

Those ladies who could, gathered on four Friday mornings in March to study 'Seeing and Savouring Jesus' by John Piper. We enjoyed our first installment and hope to complete the next 4 studies in June. They encouraged us to discover who Jesus is and to savour Him. There were some great quotes on the DVD. For example, Jesus 'absorbed' God's wrath which we deserve (Jenny brought along a cleaning cloth, tipped juice on it and we watched the juice being absorbed completely into the cloth, never to be seen again.)

Also in term 2 we are planning to repeat "Mystery Mentors" which we trialed last year. An adult 'adopts' a child in the congregation and each week anonymously puts an encouraging note or very small gift into the child's cubbyhole. The aim is to encourage and pray for each child in the congregation. At the end of the term there is a barbecue where each pair is revealed!

Southern Presbytery

DUNEDIN

Grace Bible Church

2012 is well under way and is set to be a year of changes here in Dunedin. We have started some new initiatives in women's ministry along with working through changes towards 'going double' (having two morning church services). Space has been an increasing issue as we are blessed with a growing congregation. We would love a building with space that would keep us worshipping together, but while that is not available we are doing what is best with what we have to make sure we remain welcome and open to newcomers.

Our ladies Coffee Group came to a natural end at the end of 2011 as we decided to re-shape into a Ladies Bible Study and include a broader group of women. The church has been very supportive and has offered funds for two babysitters in a nearby room to make sure that Mum's can attend without distraction. We have been blessed by a number of students who have shared this role. It has been nice to see the relationships strengthened between the ladies, the students and the children through our Tuesday morning meetings. Our study at the moment is a focus on prayer by Carol Ruvalo called "Before the Throne of God".



Jess Smith (from left), Penny Stanley, Yvonne Skeet, Kristy Richards, Jan Jopson, & Lien Trinh. Some of the ladies from our Tuesday Bible Study

Daughters of Eve: Lifegivers Book Club is our other new initiative. This idea arose from Jess Smith's time at the PCA Amazing Grace Women's Conference. Our purpose is to meet together to discuss and work through books that seek to grow us in maturity in the area of helping each other in times of crisis. We acknowledge that all women face moments of crisis in their walk with Christ. These can be from a variety of situations but the point of 'crisis' is the point at which our relationship with Christ is affected. In those times we need other women to be able to walk alongside us and point us to Christ. We have taken a selection of suggested books to our elders for approval and have a reading list that we will work

through in the coming years. We have started with the book "How People Change" by Paul Tripp & Timothy Lane. We meet once a month over breakfast at a local cafe and chat and pray through what we have been reading. We also have a Facebook group that allows us to interact in between times sharing thoughts or challenges. Our first face to face meeting was such a blessing, with open sharing of how God was already using the book to refocus lives back to relationship with Jesus and finding our identity not in our daily struggles but in Christ. One of our ladies said, "I am loving this book. I'm finding that I have to stop reading to think all the time. I'm also finding that I'm tempted to read the whole book out loud to my husband."

Prayer:

- Give thanks for numbers at church and the need to move to two services later in April. Pray that this would be a smooth transition and God would provide all that is needed.
- Give thanks for the Tuesday Bible Study and our growth in the area of prayer. Praise God also for the blessing of our student babysitters and the church's support in providing this. Pray that the women of Grace would be women of prayer.
- Pray for Daughters of Eve: Lifegivers Book club as we read, meet and discuss. Pray that God would use this to equip women to be ministering deeply into lives pointing to Jesus who Himself is the way, the truth and the life.

Dunedin student ministry points

- Give thanks for Harvest (Summer Discipleship School) over this past Summer and all the students that attended. Pray that they would continue to live for God with their whole lives, and that the gospel conversations had with co-workers would make a lasting impact on their lives.
- Give thanks for Jono and Laura, two students who came to Christ at Harvest this summer!
- Give thanks for the great start to the first semester and the new girls and guys that have been coming along to Coreteam keen to pursue Jesus.



In Brief

WYNDHAM

Wyndham Evangelical Church

Currently the Wyndham Evangelical Church is enjoying the ministry of Andrew and Pam Davies from Wales. Andrew and Pam spent some time with us when we were first getting established, and it is a great blessing to have them back ministering to us from God's Word. Our local newspaper ran an article on them which has helped to make them known in the surrounding areas. Andrew and Pam encourage us to worship God through songs and we have enjoyed some wonderful singing on Sunday mornings!

In the school holidays we ran our children's holiday programme and again were overwhelmed with the attendance and commitment of the children to learn their memory verses and listen to the story. We looked at King David as a young boy and how he trusted in God for his strength.

On ANZAC day we are opening up the church for a cup of tea after the dawn service. We hope to make contact with people who will attend the service as well as serve our community. Please pray that this will be a blessed time and opportunities will arise to share the gospel.

OWAKA

Owaka Grace Fellowship

We began Mainly Music (MM) on 5th March, 2012. Last year the idea of starting this group was mooted because across the three churches here in Owaka we were all finding we had no connecting point with the community. Many of our children had grown and left Owaka and we no longer were involved with school or preschool activities such as plunket or playcentre. We knew Mainly Music was being effective in other communities, and mothers here were traveling to Balclutha, half an hour away, so their children could be part of the programme up there. One mother had approached our local Presbyterian minister's wife to see if she could start a MM programme in Owaka. After talking with Owaka Grace and Owaka Baptist ladies it was decided that we should apply to MM for permission to do the programme. We were approved at the end of last year and so held our first session in March. We have at least eight women involved. This collaboration has meant flexibility in commitment and sharing of the workload. Enthusiasm is high and the results speak for themselves. Our first session had 16 children and 12 parents, 23 attended the next two sessions, and 27 the last session we had before the school holidays. We actually

have 32 children registered so it really is thrilling to now have a connection with the community, and when we see a lady who has been to MM we can now say hello to them. MM is held in the church where we fellowship, our local brethren hall. We have it on Mondays @ 10am during the school term.

INVERCARGILL

Grace Presbyterian Church

Here in the Deep South we are once again enjoying fellowship through various ladies' activities.

- Each month we meet for "T.O.O.T", a time of devotions, competitions and craft which provides an opportunity to share with neighbours and friends something of the joy of following Christ.
- Three groups, one morning and two evening, gather for Bible Study over a five to six week period. Last semester our theme was Contentment and various scripture passages were studied with the conclusion that without Christ we will never know true contentment. After the final study, the morning group shared in a time of prayer rather than treating themselves to coffee and cake, donating the money saved to our missionary programme. All agreed they were so blessed that this will now become a 'regular'.
- We also enjoyed a combined evening of fun and fellowship with an illustration from 2 Corinthians 4:7. Each one took home a fridge magnet with a picture of a cracked pot with the words "I am a CRACKED POT for Jesus. Please note: Cracked Pot not crackpot!!!"
- A special group of ladies devote much time and energy to reaching out to some of the needy around us through our Community Outreach Ministry. This is an arduous work, sometimes rewarding and other times quite discouraging. However in Jesus' name they carry on and rejoice in seeing some positive changes in lives. Other ladies are involved in Sunday school teaching, visitation and Bible in Schools classes.

