



**NINE
DAYS OF
PRAYER
WITH PREMIER**

DAY 1: 6 MAY 2016

An introduction to praying for marginalised people

READ: Psalm 82:3-4

Give justice to the poor and the orphan; uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute. Rescue the poor and helpless; deliver them from the grasp of evil people.

Today Premier's Novena begins with an invitation to pray for nine consecutive days, as we wait just like those first disciples, gathered in an upper room anticipated the visitation of the Holy Spirit on that first Pentecost. Each day we will identify and pray for a specific marginalised people group. But why does God have a special heart for the poor? Scripture continually reminds us this is the nature of God's Kingdom concern.

What is marginalisation? It is those who are involuntarily prevented from accessing the productive activity upon which society is built. It may be for a season, such as a period of unemployment, or as a vulnerable child grows into an independent adult.

For some marginalisation is something they can't escape. Those born with physical or learning disabilities are assumed incapable by many believing disability is insurmountable, preventing a 'normal' life, where normal represents the lifestyle of the so called able bodied. God sent his Son into the world to declare a year of Jubilee, freedom for all, no matter where they found themselves in society's pecking order.

I observed Katey forced to retire through ill health from an active teaching role to feel abandoned to a meaningless, shut-in existence due to her MS related disability. Identity was stripped from her; she was quickly forgotten and isolated. While Jayne, whom I am now married to, was abandoned by her husband when seven months pregnant with her first child, and experienced poverty. God invites us, just as Jesus came in search of the lost to open a door of mercy, to work together as Church to go in search of the marginalised, to find ways of offering hope that enables those who find themselves at the margins to walk back towards the centre. Such a Church has something to offer to a rapidly fragmenting society.

REFLECTION: Who do you know who is at the margins? They are not simply on the other side of the world. They are on your streets, dotted throughout your community.

NOVENA PRAYER: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, give me the eyes of Christ that I might see those who have slipped to the margins of society within my neighbourhood. I offer my feet that you might carry me to them, my hands that I might be an authentic source of support and encouragement to bring them hope.

NOVENA

DAY 2: 7 MAY 2016

People marginalised by their youth

READ: Jeremiah 1:6-8

‘O Sovereign Lord,’ I said, ‘I can’t speak for you! I’m too young!’ The Lord replied, ‘Don’t say, “I’m too young,” for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. And don’t be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and will protect you. I, the Lord, have spoken!’

In talking with my daughter who is in her mid-20’s I learned about the level of anxiety and stress she lives under. She grew up in a stable and loving home, has navigated school and university and is slowly making her way in the world of entertainment, not the greatest job security! Her tales of anxiety are not isolated. Every year the Prince’s Trust publish a ‘Youth Index’.¹ This reveals that over the last six years young people have grown less happy and confident as they face up to life in Britain.

The media regularly report on NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) a negative description of young people who often struggle with a range of issues. Unemployment is a major cause of anxiety and stress, not helped by the media description of unemployment being a metaphor for the lazy and those with an entitlement mentality.

One barrier to employment is a lack of experience. Providing opportunities within church based activities and persuading Christian business people to offer such working experience, would help demonstrate commitment to God’s trust in youth. Church is a community that exists for the benefit of its non-members including young people.

Local government has drastically cut back in financial support of the Youth Service over the past decade. Now British churches employ more salaried youth workers than local authorities.

REFLECTION: How do you perceive young people? Whatever they are, will you bring them to God and ask Him to enable you to be a source of encouragement to young people, within your family circle and in the wider community?

NOVENA PRAYER: Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I pray for young people struggling with stress and anxiety. I ask that you would meet them and enable them to rise above the stigma of negative labels. May your church offer support and encouragement to young people everywhere enabling them to flourish and fly rather than assume they will fail.

¹ <https://goo.gl/4vo2Ln>

NOVENA

DAY 3: 8 MAY 2016

People marginalised by disability

READ: Leviticus 19:14

Do not insult the deaf or cause the blind to stumble. You must fear your God; I am the Lord.

A 2014 survey by Scope revealed that 67% of us admit to feeling uncomfortable speaking with a disabled person. It is one reason why the disabled are often pushed to the margins. God invites us to set aside our discomfort in obedience to his invitation, something Jesus was happy to do throughout his ministry. One key reason for marginalisation is difficulty in accessing necessary resources.

Fifteen per cent of the world's population and 19% of Britons are disabled, half with an impairment to mobility. Disabled people are three times more likely to be without qualifications, are four times more likely to be out of work and to be a victim of crime than non-disabled people. With disability increasing with age, only 5% of housing stock is fully accessible.

Our challenge isn't simply to make life accessible to all but also to welcome and offer the chance to belong. The church has the opportunity to demonstrate a diverse, fully integrated, loving and serving community, the Kingdom of God.

REFLECTION: How do you respond to people with a disability? In God's eyes there is no distinction between any of his children. Do you invite disabled people to use their gifts and contribute to the life and mission of your church?

NOVENA PRAYER: Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I choose to consider my perception of the disabled. Show me how I might extend hospitality to empower people with disabilities to know that they belong to a community of love that welcomes them as image bearers of God and invites them to share their gifts and talents in the total life of the church.

NOVENA

DAY 4: 9 MAY 2016

People marginalised by old age

READ: Isaiah 46:4

I will be your God throughout your lifetime - until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you.

Ageing is something we all face. Yet, many of our anxieties come from our inability to face its challenges. They creep up on us and we are ill prepared to face them. Most importantly it's essential to have come to terms with our own mortality. So many live as though death were a distant possibility rather than an ever closer certainty.

With age comes an increased experience of loneliness. With increased numbers of divorcees and the likelihood of the death of a partner, 36% of the population aged 65+ live alone. There's growing evidence of our need for social relationships. Without these we suffer both mentally and physically through the exposure of multiple body systems to excess amounts of stress hormones. Over time, such unmet social needs take a serious toll on *health*, eroding our arteries, creating high blood pressure, and even undermining learning and *memory*.

Close to one in ten older people feel trapped in their own home. Career or the cost of living may have placed geographical distance between ageing relatives and their family. According to a survey in December 2014, 2.9 million older people (65+) in Great Britain feel they have no one to turn to for help and support.

REFLECTION: How well are you facing ageing for yourself and for family members? What of those ageing across your neighbourhood? Is the church able to offer a point of contact to introduce lonely people to one another once a week?

NOVENA PRAYER: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I pray for the aged who surround me. I thank you for their experience and wisdom. I pray as they face loneliness I might open my eyes to see them and offer a smile and word of encouragement when I pass them in the street. I ask that my church might develop a social space where they might enjoy social interaction and we might use our knowledge and skills to re-establish family relationships through the medium of technology.

NOVENA

DAY 5: 10 MAY 2016

People marginalised for being refugees

READ: Matthew 25:35

For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home.

Every week the news has fresh images of refugees fleeing the chaos of the fighting in Syria and Iraq. Many are Christians who have inhabited the region from the earliest centuries of the Church's existence. There's a danger the Christian community may well be persecuted out of existence by those with hatred and callous political ambition in their hearts and minds. Most western politicians seem uncertain how best to respond. National fears about who might be entering European countries within this wave of humanity battle with our common humanity to extend hospitality.

The Christian population in Iraq estimated at 2 million in 2003 is now reckoned to 180,000. The collapse of the Christian presence and witness is astronomical. Those who choose to remain or who cannot leave cities overrun by IS/Daesh have to hide, agree to convert to Islam or pay *Jizya*, an unaffordable unbeliever's tax.

Pope Francis has coined the phrase, '*ecumenism of blood*'. It reflects St Paul's own words that when one part of the body suffers we all suffer. We are called prayerfully and practically to support our brothers and sisters in the Middle East as the Church faces this darkest hours.

As we enter into the Godspace today, lift up the persecuted Church, especially across the Middle East, in your prayers. Encourage your church to find ways to support both those forced to flee the terrors of war and also those remaining behind, that there will always be a permanent worshipping Christian community throughout the war-torn Middle East.

REFLECTION: How fearful are you of the 'threat' from mass migration? Bring such fears to God and ask that you might see with God's eyes.

NOVENA PRAYER: *Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we pray for all those who have left their homes to flee from war. We pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the Middle East. We pray that your Church will withstand this persecution. We pray for an effective and just political solution and offer our prayers and service to that end.*

NOVENA

DAY 6: 11 MAY 2016

People marginalised by poverty

READ: Deuteronomy 15:7

But if there are any poor Israelites in your towns when you arrive in the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tightfisted toward them.

The word poor immediately conjures in my mind someone who is economically poor. They lack sufficient finances to live at a level which society defines as normal or comfortable.

Today, poverty blights the world. Indeed for all that secular enlightenment has given us, the gap between rich and poor, both globally and across the UK, is growing. Oxfam reported that in 2015 the richest 62 people in the world had the same wealth as 3.6 billion people, the bottom half of society.

While we may see the worst and most televised aspects of this far from our own shores, yet all reports reveal that a rise in poverty affecting the UK. God throughout scripture requires his people to act open-handedly towards the poor.

The Church has a role as an effective mediating structure to be the space where the poor can find some encouragement and support. It's not about handouts - none of us has enough financial resources to meet a need spiralling out of control year on year. But we do have buildings, a call to hospitality and the skills to work with those marginalised through poverty, often not a result of their own action or inaction, in seeking to encourage and empower them.

REFLECTION: How might you offer some of your leisure time to offering hospitality or practical skills training through the Church community that carries Christ's name and reputation in your community and the wider world?

NOVENA PRAYER: *Father, Son and Holy Spirit, hear me as I cry out for the economically poor. Your heart is already for them, so soften my heart and inspire my imagination that I can serve you here among the poor with my practical hospitality and skills. The first step towards enabling a social network is to open a door to a space to meet and share experience. May my church provide such a space as an expression of mercy.*

NOVENA

DAY 7: 12 MAY 2016

People marginalised by poor mental health

READ: Psalm 23:2-3a

He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength.

A lot of news stories have focused recently on the lack of adequate provision in the UK for those with poor mental health. For many an invisible condition, successfully ignored for years is slowly gaining recognition. Yet it remains stigmatised and a source of social exclusion. Many suffering with mental health issues refuse to report it with only 25% receiving any treatment while making up 41% of sickness benefit claimants. The real cost to the UK inclusive of benefits, treatment, lost work and premature death is between £70-100 billion per annum according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Acceptance for who we are is essential for each of us to flourish, something God readily gives. None of us knows how life will impact us. Many will wake up one day to realise they are facing mental health issues. That's when we need our friends to draw close not step away. As Katey and I navigated our way through MS, we felt abandoned by those who knew us best. The once packed prayer meeting in our house dwindled, then entirely disappeared. With Katey in her nursing home for the last eighteen months of her life, her pastor only managed to visit once.

I discovered my mood and reactions were subject to strong criticism to my face and also behind my back. On reflection I have learnt I was having problems with my mental health, but I quickly became isolated, and once marginalised I chose to stay there as it was easier. As a church committed to mission we must offer an open door for the mentally ill to enter through.

REFLECTION: How is your mental health? Talking is a healthy starting point, even if you get angry and over emotional as you talk. Is your church identifying and encouraging those with experience of managing mental health issues and health professionals working in this field?

NOVENA PRAYER: Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I offer to you my own mental health. You invite me to be honest with myself and with you. Give me the courage to talk with someone, rescue me from the depths of my own despair. I pray too that the church will itself offer an open door and invitation for those locked beneath the stigma and within the silence of this issue to enter and find friendship and support.

NOVENA

DAY 8: 13 MAY 2016

People marginalised by military service

READ: John 15:13

‘There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.’

My father fought his way through the whole of the Second World War. Involved in three invasions, in North Africa, Italy and France on D-Day, he served from 1939-1946. Once home he had to resume life as best he could and like so many of his generation never spoke about his experiences. How he processed what he saw at El Alamein, Monte Casino or fighting his way from the Normandy beaches to Berlin, I have no idea. He died, apparently long forgotten by a country who had required much of him and whose life was forever marked by his experiences.

In the UK, while most people are disillusioned by politician’s declarations of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, they retain a high view of service women and men, who have no option but to implement government decisions. However, with large numbers returning home disabled through action or damaged by PTSD, we offer little clear acknowledgment of their sacrifice, and can all too easily treat them as victims diminishing both their choices and their humanity. Challenges in reintegrating into civilian life are immense, regardless of the external and internal scars they return with, and they do this bravely and we must support them.

Jesus acknowledged the faith of a Centurion, a man who would have had command of as many as 200 soldiers and would have led from the front. Battle hardened and experienced in war, he approached Jesus who warmly received him and commended his faith, for he understood authority (Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10). While outside Judaism, Jesus welcomed him as an example to us all.

REFLECTION: How do you view Britain's military veterans?

NOVENA PRAYER: Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I pray for all those currently serving in the armed services and ask that you would draw alongside each one offering comfort. For those who return home, whatever their scars, that you might be a source of encouragement in enabling them to return effectively to family, friends and work effectively. I pray a blessing also for all military chaplains. Guide us in supporting veterans with the appropriate respect.

NOVENA

DAY 9: 14 MAY 2016

Children marginalised by trafficking and war

Read: Proverbs 22:6

Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.

My memories of childhood are of long summer days when I pulled on shorts and a T shirt and played with friends until bedtime. It never rained, while my rose tinted spectacles are sunglasses for the sky is forever blue and filled with sunshine. My misty eyed memories lie a long way from the reality of growing up, then and now. While poverty and deprivation rob many children of their childhood (nine in every classroom of 30 children lived below the poverty line with a household income of £272 per month or less, in 2014 according to Child Poverty Action Group) globally, some adults seek to corrupt and dehumanise children.

Child sex trafficking is much lamented in the media and church, yet is a hidden crime that appears to be on the increase around the world. There is much misunderstanding. Many children are themselves already victim of an abusive family and a failing social support framework. Many believe themselves to be in safe, consensual relationships, not yet awakened to the reality that manages their life, their sexuality and their future. Child trafficking isn't only limited to the sex industry. Foreign workers are brought to the UK to work as slaves unable to pay off their debt to the smugglers bringing them to the UK. Forced labour means no education, brutality, isolation and misery.

Child soldiers are also an international growth industry. Human Rights Watch reports, that thousands of children are now serving in armed conflicts around the world. Boys and girls, as young as eight, serve both in government and opposition forces, on the front lines, in suicide missions, as spies, messengers and lookouts. They're either abducted, recruited by force or see armed groups as their only way out of desperate circumstances.

Whatever it is that we expose our children to will exercise a strong influence upon their adult choices. Many lament an unstable world, yet such instability can only increase as children are brought up within violence, shaped by fear, and identify holding power over others as the only way to secure safety and security.

REFLECTION: What children do you know? Give thanks for their lives and ask God to bless and protect them. How could churches become a space offering sanctuary to exploited children?

NOVENA PRAYER: *Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we lift up our hands and bring before you all those children, unknown, hidden from all eyes but your own who are suffering from abuse. I ask that you comfort them and mobilise us as your church to address their crying needs.*

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING PART IN OUR NOVENA, WE
BELIEVE THAT TOGETHER WE WILL SEE THE POWER OF
PRAYER!**

Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. (Matthew 18:19,20)

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