**Soaking the City in Prayer**

Today is the 4th week of churches praying for our city. There are 22 churches in Invercargill doing this over 22 weeks. This is our week.

It has been run for the past 3 years across the city, an initiative spearheaded by Keith Harrington, pastor of Central Baptist

This year we are using the Lord’s Prayer from the Gospel of Luke for the basis of our prayer each day for the 7 days of our week.

Teach us how to pray

“‘Father, hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation.’”

Each of the 22 churches will be doing the same as us.

Prayer is not an unknown activity for Christians. Interestingly though, if you google “Prayer for Invercargill City”, the first 9 of 10 website hits come from the Islamic community here in Invercargill.

In prayer we present ourselves, and our needs, ceaselessly before the Lord. Prayer, however, is not just about us. As members of the community of faith, we also pray for the needs of others. We pray with people, and for people whether they know God or not.

I know that you are praying already, but I want us to focus on praying for our city this week.

Dick Eastman in his seminal work *The Hour that Changes the World* wrote “Where there is a frequency of prayer, there will be continuing displays of God’s power. When people pray, God responds. Difficult situations change. Unexplained miracles occur.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

We pray to see change in this city. We pray to see the atmosphere in Invercargill and the region change.

For the atmosphere in our city to change, we must pray heartfelt and continual prayers. The Bible promises us that when we do this, tremendous power is released into the atmosphere, a power that will shift our city completely, a power that is dynamic and atmosphere-altering.

We can change the atmosphere in our city, we can change the oppressing atmosphere in our nation — one city at time. Begin today, by praising God for our city and letting that praise rise into the atmosphere. Let our praises drive out the darkness and usher in the light. Speak the word of God over and into our city, bringing forth the will and plan of God for this land. And finally, make our city a place of prayer, a place where God is pleased to dwell. For where He is, there is no darkness or oppression, but only light, only freedom. May God make His abode in our city and in our nation.

We also pray because we know that when we seek God for our city, he protects the people

Jeremiah 29:4-7 *Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon…* 7 *seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare*

We pray for those in authority over us in the civic world – the Mayor, the City Council, the Regional Council and their staff and elected representatives. We pray because our City Council has resolved to keep saying a prayer at the start of each council meeting, unlike some councils or Parliament in this country.

Paul writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:1-2 says *… I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone,  for kings and all who are in high positions,* *so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.*

We are to pray for God’s intervention and protection of our city. We are not powerless because we can petition the most powerful God.

The NT makes this exciting statement about followers of Jesus overcoming the darkness of this world.

1 John 5:4–5   *whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. 5 Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

Jesus promises that our prayers will have an effect. Our prayers will have the capacity to change people’s experiences in life.

The prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective, says the book of James (5:16). Scripture continually affirms that God’s power is revealed in people’s lives when the faithful give themselves to prayer.

When I was a new Christian, I wondered why God needed us to be involved (surely, he could do it without us asking) but then I realised he has entrusted us with this world, and he uses us as his hands and feet. We are stewards of this world; we are guardians of this world, and he wants us invested in it, praying for it.

We have in our little booklets and under each of the verses of the Lord’s Prayer, a reflection from a local pastor and a suggested list of what to pray for each day this week. It is a guide only and wide enough for us to personalise our prayers. You will have particular things that God has placed on your heart under those topics. Pray for them.

Pray seriously and with an expectation that God will hear.

Pray and expect God to move. We are expecting God to move in our city through these 22 weeks of united prayer.

James 1:7-8: *“… when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.”*

Prayer is not forlorn hope because we are speaking to the creator and sustainer of the universe, and our praying activates something in God and stuff happens.

We are praying to the God who is intimately involved and interested in our lives. We are speaking to the God who bends his knee to be close to us, who bends his ear to listen to us.

E M Bounds eloquently writes that: in prayer, God stoops to kiss us, to bless us, and to aid in everything that God can devise or we can need.”

Ephesians 6:18 *Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.*

Pray with expectation that things will happen.

J C Ryle writes: Prayer has obtained things that seemed impossible and out of reach. It has won victories over fire, air, earth and water. Prayer opened the Red Sea. Prayer brough water from the rock and bread from heaven. Prayer brought fire from the sky on Elijah’s sacrifice. Prayer has healed the sick. Prayer has raised the dead. Prayer has procured the conversion of countless souls.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

God is interested in what we are praying about.

There are countless ills and sins and ungodly things we could identify as we pray for our city this week but as an example, I am offering a prayer item that touches me - that of the family.

This issue could come under Day 3 prayer about restoration and under Day 5 prayer about reconciliation.

Shortly I will show you a video clip from FamilyLife NZ to give you an idea about how to pray for this specific thing this week. You can adapt that concept of the prayer for any other issue God highlights to you.

I think that prayer for families is important. Open any paper or listen to any news item and you will be faced with the reality of the disintegration of the family unit and the fallout that is happening in our families here in NZ.

When I went to find a slide for “praying for families”, most of them – almost all of them – were about praying for MY family, not families around us. Does this suggest that we not care about families that are not our own? I hope not.

I found some shocking statistics from our country, to awake a sense of urgency in my prayers this week

1. New Zealand has the highest rate of intimate partner violence against women in the OECD. One in three women here has experienced physical, sexual or coercive violence from an intimate partner in her lifetime; the rates are higher for Māori women, New Zealand born non-white women and migrant women.[[3]](#footnote-3) That is something I need to pray about.
2. Nearly half of all homicides and reported violent crimes in NZ are related to family violence. Three quarters of people killed by their partners between 2007 and 2021 were women. Half of all women who died from IPV between 2009 and 2018 were in the process of separating from their violent partner
3. In New Zealand, it is estimated that only a third of family violence cases are reported yet on average, police attend a family violence episode every four minutes. In 2020 and 2021, there were over155,000 family harm incidences reported to the Police. Imagine if the whole number of incidents were reported.
4. Children were present at nearly two-thirds of all family violence incidents police respond to. Secondary school students witnessed adults hitting or physically hurting a child in their homes and witnessing adults hitting or physically hurting other adults in their homes.

Another thing I want to pray about is the major downturn in people getting married and committing themselves to a lifelong relationship with one person.

In the whole of NZ there were only 18700 marriages in 2023, down from 27000 in 1971 and shockingly every year 7.4% of marriages fail.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Yes, I know, there are many in de facto relationships. It was reported in 2013 that a quarter of people who were partnered were in a de facto relationship, up from 8% in 1986 [[5]](#footnote-5), but that is likely to be far higher now 12 years later.

What is clear though is that biblical marriage is on the major decline.

The result of relationship breakdown affects not only the partners but affects children in those families. In 2023 there were 5901 children under 17 years old whose parents divorced that year.

The effects of a divorce on children is staggering and I do not have time to explain in depth today.

The breakdown of marriages (legal or de facto) places a huge burden on the custodial parent, financially, security, housing – a whole gambit of problems.

In 2021 there were 99000 sole parent families, with 88% of them being mother only. In most homes the father is the breadwinner in the home so 90% of sole-parent families had incomes below the median household income for all households. Sole parents and their children have significantly higher poverty rates than parents and children in two-parent families.[[6]](#footnote-6)

If those statistics don’t force me to my knees in prayer, I don’t know what will. Families need upholding in prayer. We need God to intervene to bring restoration and reconciliation to NZ families, to bring reconciliation to warring parents, to bring safety for the children who are caught in the crossfire of domestic violence.

We need to stand against the deceiver who is whispering destruction of the family unit through divorce or separation, who tells us our happiness is paramount regardless of the cost to our families

We can physically do things to help. Our church makes available our manse to a group called Emerge – which is a group helps people needing emergency housing often as a result of broken relationship– and when we had the Nelson St property, that also was made available.

But most importantly we need to pray.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fJBIw-PMtM> prayer and blessing for families from FamilyLife NZ

I highlighted this issue today, not because it is the most pressing issue in our city, but as an example of why we need to pray for the people in our city.

Each day in the guidebook is a list of suggestions to pray under the headings. Do not be restricted to just those things. Ask God to show you what is most pressing around you in your part of the city and pray for that issue. Serious on-your-knees prayer, pouring your heart out to God for his intervention in our city

I want to end on a positive note, about how prayer can make a difference.

“When Jonas, a missionary first relocated with his family to a small town in Sweden, he became aware that there were some dynamics going on that really needed to change. So, for a week he fasted and prayed for the city, and every night he went up on a hill overlooking the town to pray and bless it. he recalled Jeremiah 29:7—to seek the welfare of the city because when it prospers, you will also prosper. Looking at that scripture, Jonas was convinced they needed to move from inward focused prayers (blessing themselves, the churches, or their ministries) to outward focused ones. “We started to pray for our city, for the school, for the health situation, for the business climate, for the political climate. We started to look for anything negative—something that was a need—and we started to pray. And little did we know that as we started to pray for this, God was starting to put things in motion.”

Just a couple of months after they started praying for the political climate, there was a big shift in the government. A new mayor came into office, who was a born-again believer and had a desire to bring blessing to the town.

The churches began to gather together once a month to pray for the city and intercede for all the needs of the town. One of the things they were praying for was the business climate, which was really competitive and negative. Four or five years after they’d started praying for this, Jonas was watching TV and there was an announcement about the best business climate in Sweden. He was shocked and surprised when their small town was named. “I was like, ‘Yes, God! You’re so awesome!’”

They prayed for the health of their town and it went from being the place in their region with the worst long-term sick leave to being at the top of the list for health within two years.

To top it all off, at one point Jonas read that the police station was going to be shut down in their city due to lack of funds. He knew there were huge problems with the youth, with drugs and other criminal things going on. So at the next prayer meeting they prayed about this situation. “God, we want police officers—and not just police officers, we want Christian police officers who can be led by the Spirit and do an even better work.” The next day Jonas was called in by the city to talk about this situation, and they promised to send two of their best police officers to address the criminality in the city. When the police officers showed up, they were believers who started every day of work with prayer that the Spirit would lead them, so they could do a greater work than they could do on their own. Within a year, crime was down 50%.

These days, Jonas and the local Church leaders are experiencing a period of peace in their city which they attribute to prayer and unity amongst believers.[[7]](#footnote-7)

We can do that here in Invercargill, we can see change because we pray.

[Next](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Mad-SalLLXw) week we start of Renew Together appeal so I want to close with a promo video of that.

1. Dick Eastman *The Hour that Changes the World* 12-13 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Eastman 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/news/2020/12/07/hierarchies-in-nzs-domestic-violence-problem.html#:~:text=New%20Zealand%20has%20the%20highest%20rate%20of%20intimate,New%20Zealand%20born%20non-white%20women%20and%20migrant%20women. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/marriages-civil-unions-and-divorces-year-ended-december-2022/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.lawcom.govt.nz/assets/Publications/StudyPapers/NZLC-SP22.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/sole-parenting/sole-parenting-in-nz-an-update-on-key-trends-and-what-helps-reduce-disadvantage.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Novo: Make New [↑](#footnote-ref-7)