

INTERCESSION POINTERS

Lord teach us to pray.

These are the words of the disciples, to which Jesus responds with the Lord's prayer. Imagine if the disciples had asked a somewhat similar request, Lord teach us to lead intercessions in worship. Of course there is no direct answer as a response from Jesus, however, there are some tips that are helpful for those who lead and prepare intercession and those who hear the prayers and add their own prayer.

Just like in children's services where we have often heard the intercessor use the 'hand prayer' where each finger is a petition, a bidding request, which helps to distribute the concerns and needs. The smallest finger comes as our final petition and usually represents our own needs. This is important, as much of intercessory prayer can be about our own rather small concerns. The church picnic might feature largely on our own radar, but it is small stuff compared to world events.

While Jesus did address God as Father, keep in mind that there are many other forms of addressing God within the Bible. As well, just because your favourite expression for God may be Lord of the Angel Armies, it might not be that way with a lot of the congregation, so it provides opportunity for entry points when forms of address for God are rich and varied.

Another good rule of thumb is that the intercessions are not a personal reflection on the Bible, nor are they an opportunity to get your ideas in that the preacher may have left out. Keeping intercessions short to around 5 points that feature a number of different areas is good and simple.

The Common Worship Book from the Church of England has daily as well as seasonal petition ideas for example: The universal Church; Bishops, synods and all who lead the Church; The leaders of the nations; the natural world and the resources of the earth; all who are in any kind of need. That is only a small sample as we can stretch from Agricultural concerns to her Majesty the Queen.

In developing the prayers one should consider how the congregation is to respond. Spoken and sung responses should be short, easy to remember. Lord, in your mercy...(you have probably already answered) hear our prayer and Taize styled responses are perfect. Just like telephone numbers, the short and important ones (112) are easier to recall than 0118 999 881 999 119 7253 (don't call this poor fire station!).

Lastly, be personal in that if you know there is a crisis somewhere in the world, name it. However, if you know that someone is hurting, it is best to seek their permission before the rest of the congregation asks them about their struggling relationship, or illness. Also, be personal in your choice of silence. Sometimes the congregation needs some warning for long pauses of silence, at others, you will need to 'read' the mood of the congregation and judge how long a moment of silence should be between petitions. Silence is a wonderful thing as it allows people to enter into the petition with their own prayers.

At the very last, end with an Amen.

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