



Pray for the Nation ~ INOI MO TE MOTU Intercessors for New Zealand

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“A rest [sabbath] remains for the people of God. Those who enter into God’s rest also rest from their works, as God did from His. Be eager to enter into that rest.” Hebrews 4:9-11

Too busy for God ?

Most of us, unless we are unemployed, under-employed or retired, live in a very busy world where there is just so much to do and (seemingly) so little time to do it. For those who are Christians, in a sense there is “even more to do” because we have our own personal Christian lives to live – and that involves reading and studying God’s Word, prayer, Christian fellowship and other meetings – as well as serving other people and being a witness to them.

So when we come across verses such as the following, we may feel slightly embarrassed by them, or challenged or convicted by them, but at least we sometimes feel uncomfortable ... because we are not sure we are really living by what they say!

“Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you” (Matthew 6:33). Are we really seeking the Lord and His Kingdom **first** – as a first priority in our lives – or are we just squeezing it into our busy lives?

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength” (Mark 12:30). This is the first and greatest commandment – or is it, in practice, one we try our best to keep but are usually not very successful? “... all our heart, soul, mind and strength”? Is this even **a** priority, let alone our **first** priority?

“Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall rest from your labours” (Exodus 20:8-10). Two important points about this commandment given to Moses and the children of Israel:

1. **Sabbath** means “cessation” [from work] or “rest”; it doesn’t mean Saturday (or Sunday, or 6 pm Friday to 6 pm Saturday!) This commandment says, in effect, “Remember the day of rest and keep it separate and different from the other six days. Rest on the day of rest, and work or labour on the other days.”
2. While the Israelites added many rules and regulations to this commandment, Jesus clarified it by saying that the sabbath (day of

rest) was made for us – for **our benefit**, not for God’s; not to be a burdensome command to keep but something to rejoice and delight in! (Mark 2:27). Whichever is our sabbath day, it should be a delight to do what is enjoyable, not burdensome labour – a “Rest day” not “Labour day”!

“Come to Me all you who labour and are heavy laden [burdened down with worries, work, or whatever] and I will give you **rest**. Take My yoke upon you [a yoke shared the load – but in this case Jesus takes the heavy load!] and learn from Me ... and you will find **rest** for your souls. For My yoke is **easy** and My burden is **light**.” (Matthew 11:28-30). If we are weighed down by anything, then we haven’t really given it to the Lord! (Maybe we are trying to carry burdens that **we** have picked up; they may not be things God has even asked us to do or carry! No wonder they’re heavy – they weren’t meant for us!)

“Martha, Martha! You are worried and distracted by many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken from her” (Luke 10:38-42). When Jesus is visiting our home and wanting to speak to us, we need to sit at His feet and listen. It’s not time for work, or even for “coffee and cakes” – it’s time to sit, rest, listen and learn. Busy-ness is the art of always being too busy!

How sad – how terribly sad, that we (including me!) often do not spend time with the Lord each day; many people can’t be bothered going to a church to fellowship with the Lord and with other Christians once a week, to worship God together, and listen and learn together. Because we’re too busy and therefore too tired to spend time with Jesus!

Please pray about these issues in my life, and in your life, and in the lives of many (most?) other Christians!

BIBLE STUDY BOOKS ...

See our website for our range of Bible study books:

www.pray-for-the-nation.org/bible-study-books.php

*Ideal for personal Bible study and reflection
or for use in church Home Groups, etc.*



The Church of Jesus Christ – Brian Caughley

1. Introduction

As a teenage Christian I used to attend the weekly Christian meetings held in the college to which I went. There were about 1000 students at this college but only about 20 or 30 attended these meetings. My concept of the Church was, as I later discovered, far from what it should have been. I had read Matthew 16:18 in which Jesus said “I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”, but for some reason I always thought He was saying that even though the devil would attack the Church, Christ would protect it, and it would not be destroyed.

I thought of the Church as a tiny minority who met together for mutual support and encouragement, to pat each other on the back and say to each other, “Be of good cheer; though the enemy is attacking us and is so strong, all is not lost for we will eventually pull through with God’s help.” My thoughts were of strong attacks of the enemy, and Christians huddling together for fear that they would be destroyed, except for God’s help.

Then one day, I suddenly realized that the “gates” of hell are *not* the attacks of the enemy; gates are positions of *defence*, not attack. In a walled city, in which the walls are built of massive stone blocks, very high and very thick, the wooden gates were the weakest place in the wall, and Jesus said that the gates (*defences*) of *hell* would not prevail against the onslaughts of the Church!

This was a complete reversal of my previous way of thinking! Hell was not attacking the Church; the Church was to attack and destroy all the defences of hell! This revolutionized my idea of the Church: no longer was it a weak, feeble minority huddling together to fend off the attacks of the enemy – it was the power of God to destroy every evil work of Satan; not to defend but to attack; not conquered but conquering; not weak but powerful; not defeated but victorious – the Winner!

The word “hell” in Matthew 16:18 is actually the word *hades* in the Greek, and it means death. So death will not overcome the

Church – the Church is triumphant over death because Jesus triumphed over death! The Church is eternal! Just as we Christians – believers in, and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ – have eternal life, *hades* will never triumph over us, through physical death or spiritually. We are Overcomers! Hallelujah!

Many years ago I was studying the book of Acts. Each night I would read a chapter or so, meditate on what I had read, and then spend some time in prayer, talking to God. One of the things that really puzzled me was the tremendous difference between the Church as I knew it, and the Church I was reading about in the Bible. The differences seemed so great that I wondered if the Church today as I knew it (that was in December 1963) was really related to the early New Testament Church. The early Church had such power and authority, vitality and growth – it was exciting to be a Christian, not something of which to be nervously embarrassed or ashamed!

Since those days I have done much thinking, praying and searching the Scriptures concerning the Church. Over the past few years God has been saying much to Christians about the Church. After all, the Church is the visible expression of Christ in the world today. What the unbeliever knows of Christ is what he sees in the lives of Christians – for better or for worse!

Over the years I have heard some very negative talk by some Christians about the Church—for example, “If that’s what the Church is like I don’t want to have anything to do with it”, or “I’ve given up on the Church”, or “I don’t belong to any church”, etc. Usually these statements have come because Christians have been hurt by someone in a church (especially someone in leadership), or there is an authoritarian, dictatorial or controlling leadership, or there is teaching and/or practices within the church which are not Biblical, etc. But the Church is the Body of Christ and all true Christians belong to the Church of Jesus Christ. All Christians need to belong to a church (fellowship of believers). We are not called to be alone; we are part of God’s Family! Jesus *is* building His Church and the gates of hell will *not* prevail against it. It is not perfect (yet!) only because Christians are not perfect in their

behavior – yet! All Christians need to be very careful what they say about the Church of Jesus Christ which **He** is building! And we all need to be careful that **we** are not partly responsible for some of the terrible things that are said about the Church, even by Christians!

The words Church or churches (Gk. *Ekklesia* – those who are called out [from the world]) occur 112 times in the New Testament, and while the Church is not perfect (because you and I are not perfect!) it is the Body and Bride of Christ, and must be respected as such!

We need to pray for the Church – that it will truly reflect the glory, wisdom and power of God; that it will grow according to God’s plan, not man’s; that it will be the light of the world, showing forth our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Above all, we need to pray that we will have “ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches” in these days. We have become incredibly bound by traditions and by worldly ways of thinking. We need to see the Church as God desires it to be, in all its splendour.

With these thoughts in mind, I have prepared these Bible studies on **THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST**. May we catch a vision of what God wants to show us with regard to the Body of Christ, and may we see it implemented in our land as we intercede for the Church!

“He who has ears to hear ... let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Mark 4:9; Rev. 2:7).

Note: In these studies, a local church or churches is written with a small “c” to distinguish it from the Church (capital “C”) of Jesus Christ which comprises all true believers/disciples of Jesus, throughout history.

QUESTIONS

1. Why are many Christians embarrassed about their Faith?
2. What do some Christians not like about the church as they experience it?
3. How similar to the New Testament Church is the church you go to?
4. How is the Church spoken of, and regarded, in the New Testament?
5. Why do some Christians not go to a church but “isolate” their faith and only meet with a few Christian friends on random occasions, rather than regularly meet together for mutual prayer, worship, encouragement and teaching?
6. What is the difference between the Church and the churches?
7. Why does the Church often appear to be weak, in the midst of a strong, powerful, huge world in which we live?



Prayer Suggestions

THE CHURCH – THE PEOPLE OF GOD

- The Church is the **Bride of Christ**: “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. ... This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the Church.” (Ephesians 5:25-32. Also Revelation 19:7; 21:9)
- The Church is the **Body of Christ**: “You are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” (1 Corinthians 12:27)
- The Church is the **Building of Christ**: “We are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.” (1 Corinthians 3:9. Also Matthew 16:18)

It is (or should be) quite distressing to hear Christians speaking very negatively about the Church. Many Christians, apparently, do not “go to church” – that is, meet regularly with other Christians as a group – probably because of the way they have been treated or hurt in the past, either by leaders in the church or by other

Christians in the church. Some Christians can’t be bothered having fellowship regularly with other Christians – they don’t seem to think it is necessary or helpful to them or to others. The Church or churches (Gk. *Ekklesia*) are mentioned 112 times in the New Testament, and while sometimes there are things mentioned that are wrong in the church (because none of us is perfect), Jesus loves the Church and gave Himself up for her! **Let us pray** that the Church will reflect all it should of the love, glory and power of its Creator – the Lord Jesus Christ!

Unity in the Body of Christ. “Be **eager** to **maintain** the **unity** of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:3). One of the greatest harms done to, or by, the Church is its divisions. Because of the size of the church, it is necessary and desirable to meet in groups, but there should be a fundamental and practical unity between all believers in, and followers of, Jesus Christ. Our differences of opinion, or our preferences, should not fundamentally divide us so that the world sees a divided Body. We are one in the bonds of

Christ's love; we should be one in our witness to the world by the way we love and act. **Pray for** unity between all churches where believers are following the Lord.

Upbuilding one another. "When you come together, each of you has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up." (1 Corinthians 14:26). All Christians should be seeking to encourage, edify and build up one another in our Christian faith and walk with the Lord. This is one major reason why we meet together – not just for what **we** get out of it, but to encourage and help one another! **Pray that** every Christian will come together with other Christians each week and actively see what they can do to encourage other people in their church.

Let faith arise! "Whatever does not proceed from faith, is sin." (Romans 14:23). Christians are called to walk by faith; to live by faith; to believe! We live in a doubting, sceptical but also a somewhat gullible world – some people are great unbelievers; others will believe in anything! Our faith is in the Almighty God and His Word. The Church should be known for its seeking after God and its exercising of faith – even faith in spite of huge obstacles. Have faith in God! Walk by faith. **Please pray** that Christians will be believers – believers in the one true God; believers in His written Word, and believers in what He reveals to us by His Spirit. Pray that we will step out in faith as He leads us to do so, and see God's ability and willingness to do miracles for the glory of His name and the blessing of people!

Effective witness. "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20). The whole world needs to know what we know – Who Jesus is; what God requires of us; how to find salvation through Jesus Christ, and how to follow Him. **Pray that** Christians, and churches as a whole, will have an effective witness wherever they are, to the whole world. Pray for Church growth, for people's salvation and God's glory (not just so that we can be proud of how big "our church" is!)

Willing to serve. "Like good stewards of the many-faceted grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received." (1 Peter 4:10). **Please pray** that we will all serve one another, both inside the church and to the outside world around about us, thus demonstrating God's love and compassion to all people, no matter who they are.

True, sacrificial love. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ..." (John 3:16). **Pray that** all Christians will really seek

to demonstrate to the world the love that God demonstrated to us, in sending His only Son to die for us. True love is costly; it is patient, kind, not jealous or proud, not self-centred, irritable or resentful ... (1 Cor. 13:4-8a). **Pray that** this love – in you and me, and in all other believers, will be shown to the world that has little idea of what true love really is! Pray that all Christians will live lives of love – to God first, others second, and self last.

A powerful, Spirit-filled Church. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses ... to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8). **Pray for** a powerful, dynamic, growing, holy, God-glorifying Church that effectively worships God (in word and in deed), intercedes for people, teaches and shares God's Word, demonstrates the Christian life and brings others to Christ – all by the power and inspiration of God's Holy Spirit! Wow!!

PRAYING FOR OUR COUNTRY

Praise God for what is being done in New Zealand to reach the lost with the Gospel, and pray for the millions of people in New Zealand who still have no idea Who God is, and who have no relationship with Him.

Pray that all Christians and churches will remain true to the Lord and God's Word, and will not be distracted or deceived by the devil who tries to make us compromise or fall away from God's grace and truth.

Pray for all leadership in our country: in our Government, Churches, City and Town Councils, in homes and families – for good leaders; for wisdom and Godliness to prevail.

Pray for all those people who struggle in their daily lives with poor health, poverty, rejection, drugs, violence or abuse.

Praise God that He has promised to supply all our needs in every way – pray that we will come to Him, seek Him, worship Him and trust Him for all His love and goodness to us. "May God's Kingdom come! May God's will be done on earth as it is in Heaven!" Amen!

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