

# 67

## The joy of prayer

Date:

*The prayers of Jesus*

**PRAY** Begin with a time of praise: 'Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name' (Psalm 103:1).

**READ** Luke 10:1–24

### REFLECT

This was a moment to savour. The 72 missionaries had returned with reports of effective outreach (10:17). You can imagine Jesus giving 'high fives' to each one as they went around the circle sharing their experiences. But, in the middle of this victory celebration, Jesus took time for an impromptu prayer meeting (10:21). We can take two important pointers from this prayer:

*Emphasis on joy* The missionaries were feeling the joy of success; they had obeyed Jesus and seen results. That principle still works today. But Jesus' joy was more profound because he saw the deeper reality of what was happening. Verse 21 says he was 'full of joy through the Holy Spirit'. Satan, the real enemy, was being defeated (10:18) and God's self-revelation was becoming more clear and understandable – even to the most unlikely persons (10:21). Too often, prayer can become a solemn recitation of problems and worries. But when we really understand what God is doing in the world, it makes us want to shout for joy.

*Confidence in God's plan* 'Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure' (10:21). Some people think of prayer as a kind of hopeless, wishful thinking: 'Oh well, all I can do now is pray. Maybe I'll get lucky.' But when we really understand that God is in control of everything, we can be bold. Confidence in God's power and will is another vital part of prayer.

In spite of this inspiring prayer, Jesus knew his followers would eventually face difficulties, so he gave them two important reminders:

*Live with the kingdom in mind.* No matter what happens, whether we experience success or failure, living with the *kingdom* end in mind (10:20) puts everything else into proper perspective.

*Live with the big picture in mind.* God has been at work for a long time (10:23,24) drawing people to himself, and he will continue to do so. Our responsibility is not to achieve success, but to remain faithful to God – another reason we need to pray.

**APPLY** What things about Jesus make you feel the most joyful?

**PRAY** Praise Jesus with these words: 'I will shout for joy and sing your praises, for you have ransomed me' (Psalm 71:23, NLT).

# 68

## The school of prayer

Date:

*The prayers of Jesus*

**PRAY** Close your eyes and concentrate on the fact that God is really with you in the room. How do you feel? What are you thinking? Now, what would you like to say to him?

**READ** Luke 11:1–13

### REFLECT

If someone asked you to help them develop a deeper prayer life, how would you respond? By explaining your prayer habits? By sharing a book on the subject? By suggesting a helpful tape or seminar? Jesus begins his response by simply praying. If you want to get better at praying, he seems to say, don't spend too much time studying it. Just pray.

The Lord's Prayer (see also Matthew 6:9–15) is undoubtedly the most famous and most repeated prayer in history. Over the centuries, many of the Church's best minds have analysed this prayer. But for our purposes we note that effective prayer involves two perspectives, which need to be in balance:

*Beyond us* In prayer we look beyond ourselves to God, his nature, his holiness, his kingdom and his will (11:2).

*Close to us* Yet we should not hesitate to focus on our day-to-day needs – food, forgiveness and strength to avoid temptation (11:3,4).

Jesus then encourages *boldness* (11:5–10). Does that mean we can ask for new cars, big bank accounts and dream houses? Not exactly. Jesus' story, as well as other passages in the Bible (Matthew 6:8; 26:42; Philippians 4:19), reminds us to focus on our genuine needs, not our selfish wants.

Jesus also reflects on prayer from God's perspective and the analogy he uses is a loving father caring for a needy child (11:11–13). God loves us and he knows what is truly best. Our mistake is we want to tell him what 'good gift' he must give us. Sometimes we need to let go of what we think is the best solution to our problems and pray for an acceptance of his will, whatever that may be. Jesus assures us that a heart attitude of faith in our loving heavenly Father, combined with a bold persistence in prayer, will get incredible results (Matthew 17:20,21).

**APPLY** What is one situation in your life that needs bold, persistent prayer to Jesus? Is it a need or a want?

**PRAY** Spend time talking to Jesus about the biggest current problem in your life.