

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: THE PRAYERS OF JESUS

After you've completed the five readings in this section, get together with another person or group to talk about the things you've learned. Begin by sharing the insights you gained from your own reflection on the passages. Then use the following questions to help you continue the conversation.

- 1 How did you first learn about prayer? Over the years, have you known any 'prayer warriors' and what have they taught you?
- 2 What have you learned from the example of Jesus and his prayers?
- 3 When do you feel that your prayers are the most meaningful and effective? When, if at all, do you experience prayer that makes you feel close to Jesus?
- 4 Think about the prayer that Jesus 'modelled' for his followers (Luke 11:1-13)? What are the most challenging or meaningful parts for you?
- 5 Have you ever prayed for Jesus' help at a time when you were under great pressure? What happened? Did that experience change your view of prayer? Of Jesus?
- 6 What are the biggest obstacles to praying you face? How can you overcome these?
- 7 How could you develop a 'prayer lifestyle'? What are some new and creative ways you could make prayer a more significant part of your daily life?

THE HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS

In 1742 Charles Wesley wrote the words to the hymn 'Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild'. It thoughtfully expressed Wesley's desire to simply and completely follow Jesus. But, over the years, I've heard people quote the title of that hymn as a way of expressing a rather simplistic view of Jesus: that he was some kind of sissy who walked around making fluffy moral statements to be memorised in Sunday School or printed on fridge magnets. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild... isn't that nice?

I hate to burst anyone's bubble, but I'm not at all sure that's what Charles Wesley had in mind, and it's certainly not representative of the things Jesus said in his teaching ministry. Certainly, Jesus said some wonderful and encouraging things, as we've been exploring in our journey through the Bible. But, as we're about to discover in our next five readings, Jesus also made many statements that were very difficult to understand. In fact, at one point in his ministry, people were so turned off by his teaching that they said, 'This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?' (John 6:60, RSV) and they deserted him in droves.

Sometimes Jesus said things that were obscure; they were difficult to understand. Other times he said things that were challenging and difficult to obey. We'll be covering some from both categories:

- Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.
- Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.
- You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.
- This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.
- If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

If you are intrigued by this line of study, I would suggest that you get a copy of *Hard Sayings of Jesus* by FF Bruce (IVP) which covers 70 of the most challenging statements that Jesus ever made. But for now, five will do, so let's get going.
