

“If my people . . .”

We are offering a series of reflections for individuals and churches who may be finding it difficult to provide midweek prayer and shared learning from Scripture. You can use these by watching the YouTube video, reading the relevant Bible passage and then reflecting on the questions below. To help make this a shared activity, you are encouraged to reflect on this together with friends using an online conference package, or simply arrange with a friend for them to watch it too. Then ring each other up, share your thoughts and responses and then pray for one another, and pray together for our world.

Read 2 Chronicles 7:13-16

If you can, watch the YouTube video: <https://youtu.be/zVOydwFLqI>

“There is no instruction book for a worldwide pandemic” – this is a phrase that many have repeated over recent months. It is a helpful reality to remember – as families, as individuals, for church leaders, for political leaders, all are seeking to manage a whole raft of different expectations, Addressing one problem often seems to exacerbate a problem somewhere else. So perhaps, remembering that there are no specific instructions might help to temper our expectations and frustrations when people act in ways that we don't agree with. Yet as we look at these words from 2 Chronicles, we might recognise that there are some instructions after all – one of the scenarios envisaged is the affliction of a plague. Spend some time reflecting on how God invites us to respond:

If my people . . . God begins by reminding those who gather that they are God's people – it is they who have a responsibility to act. God's people are those who stand out because God is present among them. What does it mean for us to be God's people in our present circumstances? How is God calling us to respond and act? How can we be beacons of hope in the midst of our present situation?

Humble yourselves: God's people are first called to humble themselves. There are many toxic narratives in our world at the moment – not all of them restricted to Covid-19. Many have their roots in attitudes of self-importance and self-interest. Our present circumstances will not be overcome by arrogance, either by politicians claiming to have all the answers or religious people claiming to know what God is doing. Our world needs humility – in many ways Covid-19 has revealed to us our true vulnerability. Without humility there is no reason to pray, for we will not be open to what God might say to us. God responds to our humility with forgiveness and healing, but this is God's to give, not ours to demand and define. What do you need to release and submit to God in humility?

Seek God's face: God's people are invited to pray by seeking God's face, not inviting God to embrace our agendas. How can you trace the presence of God amidst this storm? Where are you listening to God's voice? How are you seeking to know God's will and purpose for you in the midst of this reality?

Turn from your wicked ways: Notice that this is a communal and corporate message – we may not seek to be deliberately wicked, but can become surrounded by a society where going against God's purposes becomes so commonplace, we fail to notice. We might pray as David prayed - “Search me O God and show me my faults” Show me what I have become so used to that I've stopped noticing what's wrong about it. Perhaps part of our world being stopped in its tracks as it has, is to afford us the opportunity to reflect on what really does need to change. How is God inviting us to think and act differently? Are we open to God's healing, or do we simply want God to deliver healing as we define it?

PRAYER

Loving God, we give you thanks that although our circumstances are so very different to anything we are used to or might have expected, you are present with us. Show us what it means to be your people in these difficult and challenging times; help us to come before you with humility and to see our true selves for what we are. Help us to seek your face and to understand your purpose for us – show us how you want us to think and act differently. Bring your healing we pray, and make us open to receive what you provide – not simply to expect you to offer what we have defined as required. Through Jesus our Lord.
AMEN