



NOVENA

THY KINGDOM COME

Praying the Psalms from Ascension to Pentecost

THYKINGDOMCOME.GLOBAL

Novena 2021 from *Thy Kingdom Come*

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NOVENA

PRAYING A NOVENA

A Novena is nine days of prayer that usually encourages us to pray with a particular intention. Praying for other people is known as a prayer of intercession.

Our nine days of prayer open and close with reflections for Ascension Day and Pentecost Sunday to help you prepare and give thanks to God.

Before you start

- Prayerfully choose five people to pray for, and pray during these 11 days that they would know the transforming love of Christ.
- Set a time each day when you will take a moment of prayer.
You only need about 10 minutes.
- Set a reminder on your phone, a note on your fridge or somewhere visible to prompt you to pray each day

INTRODUCTION

PRAYING FOR THE KINGDOM

Thy Kingdom Come Prayer

Almighty God,
your ascended son has sent us into the world to
preach the good news of your kingdom:
inspire us with your Spirit
and fill our hearts with the fire of your love,
that all who hear your word
may be drawn to you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen.

In the days between Ascension and Pentecost, we are committing ourselves to pray for friends and family to come to know the love, hope and peace found in Christ. This year, we will be using some of the psalms as a structure and guide for our prayer and reflection, holding on to the thought that ‘God has willed to make himself known in the mystery of the psalms.’
[Thomas Merton, Praying the Psalms]

In order to do this, you might like to think of each of our psalms as a conversation, often with several voices. Usually, though not always, God is there. Then there are the human voices, the praise singers and complainants, the rested and the discouraged, the angry and the forgiving.

And thirdly, there is your voice, silent or urgent. The question remains: whose are the many human voices that we hear in our chosen psalm, whether we recognize them as friends or foes, neighbours or strangers, people we pray for often or those we have never thought of praying for, praying for the greatest gift of them knowing Christ for themselves?

Sometimes the conversation in a psalm is straightforward. At other times it may feel like a babble, with voices talking across or against each other. Our task – the discipline we might undertake during these days – is to carry out a kind of spiritual eavesdropping! As with any kind of ‘listening in’, we try not to analyse or jump to conclusions, simply wanting to be there, to be present with God, for the world. In particular, we may want to look for places in our daily psalm where we can hear the voice of our friend or family member.

As we listen patiently, certain voices come to the fore while others fade. The task for us who pray the psalms is to hold the insistent voices in our hands, lift them up to God with tears or laughter and stay there until God bids us go.

Each day, there will be a psalm, some text and a picture. The opening and closing days of Ascension and Pentecost are like bookends to the nine days of prayer in between, setting the theme and drawing it to a close. The picture does not illustrate the psalm, but may help enrich your prayer. Enjoy it, use it, or ignore it. But whatever you do, enjoy praying!



ASCENSION DAY

THY KINGDOM COME

TELLING THE STORY

Psalm 47:5-7 (NIV)

- 5 God has ascended amid shouts of joy,
the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets.
- 6 Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.
- 7 For God is the King of all the earth;
sing to him a psalm of praise.

We cannot know what the disciples thought when they saw Jesus ascending into heaven, though ‘What do we do now?’ might have featured prominently. Luke reminds us that their experience makes them ‘witnesses’, but they would have to wait until Pentecost when the Spirit descended.

This wait was not passive, with life on hold. It was active and engaged: ‘they were continually in the temple blessing God.’ This brings us neatly to our psalm, which is a song of God’s people who have experienced the repeated power, triumph, and grace of God in caring for them. This is the song of the witnesses, and it does three things:

- it broadcasts the story of the wonderful acts of God;
- it invites those who hear to become part of that story;
- it calls on them to make a lot of noise about God.

At its heart, this is a reminder to us that our witnessing begins with worship which is full of heartfelt gratitude, and contagious and unrestrained joy. Such witnesses to the power of God do not hold back.

The second point is easy to miss in modern translations of verse 7. *Sing to him a psalm of praise* should read *sing praises with understanding*. Witnesses, Christians, are also called to the hard graft of thinking, of standing up for our faith in the face of apathy and opposition. Sing loudly, sing intelligently and pray ‘Come Holy Spirit’.

*Come, Holy Spirit, and fill us with overflowing joy;
Give _____ a sense of your unexpected presence.*



DAY 1

PRAISE

AMAZING GRACE

Psalm 150:1-6 (NIV)

- 1 Praise the Lord.
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.
- 2 Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.
- 3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,
- 4 Praise him with tambourine and dancing,
praise him with the strings and pipe,
- 5 Praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.
- 6 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord
Praise the Lord.

This psalm continues yesterday's party/celebration theme. Four of the six verses simply list instruments that we can use, and the last verse wraps it all up with the inclusive 'everything' – you, me, animals, plants, the natural order, the cosmos and the big bang itself!

Verse 2 is quite different and specific: *Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.* It invites us to catalogue the ways in which God has been involved in shaping our lives, accompanying us on our journey. For the Israelites, they would have thought about their release from Egypt and later from exile, about the promised land, and their God-given kings and prophets.

For us too, it invites us to recall times when God came close to us; people who were instrumental in bringing us to faith or building us up; occasions when we have known God's rescuing power from our own sin or from life's troubles. We do this by remembering those times formally (perhaps in a journal, by telling a friend, or writing our own psalm).

If you do this (as we hope you will), two things will happen. The first is that you will be amazed at how blessed you are by God – by amazing grace! The second, which flows naturally out of it, is that you will find yourself longing for others whom you know and love to experience this same blessing. It is this deep longing which gives us the energy to hammer on heaven's door for them until one day they are able to sing this psalm for themselves.

*Come, Holy Spirit, and give us the gift of story-telling;
Help _____ to hear and be changed by our story.*

DAY 2

THANKS

A RESCUING GOD

Psalm 116:5-9 (NIV)

- 5 The Lord is gracious and righteous;
our God is full of compassion.
- 6 The Lord protects the unwary;
when I was brought low, he saved me.
- 7 Return to your rest, my soul,
for the Lord has been good to you.
- 8 For you, Lord, have delivered me from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling,
- 9 that I may walk before the Lord
in the land of the living.

At the heart of Thy Kingdom Come is our prayer that people may come to know Jesus. To this end, our psalms so far have invited us to tell the story of God, and our own stories within that story, sharing ways in which God has touched our lives.

Today's psalm builds on that and points us towards thankfulness. In verse 3, the writer says that *the cords of death entangled me... and I was overcome by distress and sorrow*. It encapsulates the struggles and battles of our life, and it is in times like these that we turn in our helplessness to God and find the way forward. Those little experiences of the grace and compassion of God spill out of the psalmist's mouth: *Our God is full of compassion; The Lord has been good...*

Of course, God offers so much more than what we have already experienced. This psalm hints at this in verse 8, referring to our freedom from death. We are reminded that Jesus, the Son of God, came into this world to embrace us as sinners and to set us free by dying on the cross.

In the end the psalm does three things:

- it draws our attention to what God has already done for us, and invites us to be thankful:
- it calls us to share our thankful stories with our friends; and
- it invites us to pray for those who do not yet have a sense of God's care for them, who do not yet know how to say thank you to God.

Come, Holy Spirit, and fill our hearts with deep thankfulness; Show our friends, especially _____, how much God is doing for them.



DAY 3

SORRY

A HEALING TOUCH

Psalm 51:1-4 (NIV)

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
- 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

Yesterday we thought a little about the language of sin and the mess in our lives (caused by ourselves and by others). As we look today at the most famous of all the ‘sorry’ psalms, it is worth considering what it means to say sorry to God, and how we might weave that into our prayer for those we long to come to Jesus.

This psalm is traditionally ascribed to King David repenting of his behaviour with Bathsheba. It is a passionate prayer, which holds nothing back from God: *Against you... have I sinned... so you are right in your verdict.* Painfully honest, it is a personal exposé of the truth.

Remarkably, though the writer knows that God would be just in returning a guilty verdict, the psalm begins with an appeal to an even more important truth, that God is compassionate and merciful. It is saying in effect, ‘I deserve to be punished, but you are a forgiving God.’ So to say sorry to God is to tell the painful truth about ourselves, trusting that God will administer a healing touch, not a death blow.

We can apply this truth to the lives of those for whom we pray by asking God to make himself known to them, so that they will experience his compassionate love for themselves. But you might also like to pray the ‘Jesus Prayer’ on their behalf, inserting their name: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on _____, a sinner.*

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner;

*Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on _____,
a sinner like me.*

DAY 4

OFFER

YEARNING AND LONGING

Psalm 23 (NIV)

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
- 3 He refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
- 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- 5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
- 6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.



This most famous of psalms has is most often used as a funeral hymn. While that is not inappropriate, it is better read as a psalm of yearning for the satisfaction that only God can provide.

Although the psalm hints at what we want or need out of life, it is more interested in our need of God. It speaks of God's presence, companionship, guidance, and it ends with an invitation to live eternally at home with God. This is the yearning that should inform all our intercessions. When we ask God for 'stuff', we remember that our need of God is the most basic of all human needs.

This can then be applied to those for whom we pray this week. We ask God to convert their needs and wants into a hunger for God himself, so that one day they may be able to confess with St Augustine of Hippo, *Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.*

*Come, Holy Spirit, and give me the rest I long for;
Fill _____ with a yearning for you.*



DAY 5

PRAY FOR

BUILDING BRIDGES

Psalms 57:1-3 (NIV)

- 1 Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me.
For in you I take refuge.
I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings
until the disaster has passed.
- 2 I cry out to God Most High,
to God who vindicates me.
- 3 He sends from heaven and saves me
Rebuking those who hotly pursue me –
God sends forth his love and his faithfulness.

As we pray for people to find faith in Jesus, we are aware of how difficult it is these days to talk to them about the things of God. Even to mention God in some settings can be really difficult. In such contexts, and in our families, we are left with modes of evangelism such as: the witness of our lives, our hospitality, the offer of prayer and the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

All are powerful, but what sets the offer of prayer apart from the others is that it creates a bridge between the non-believer and God, rather than between non-believer and believer. To offer a non-believer the gift of prayer is to turn attention away from ourselves and towards God. Perhaps strangely, non-believers still regularly accept our offer to pray for them.

We who believe pray in trust and hope, having the confidence that God will act. Those who do not believe are more likely to regard prayer as a wish, a cry of last resort. The striking thing about the whole of Psalm 57 is that it addresses a number of difficult situations with confidence of God's love and action. In today's verses the writer names the situations and cries out, but later in the psalm we hear the words of trust, that *great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies.*

In your prayers today, use this psalm as if you were the other person, standing in their shoes, expressing their needs and cries to God for them.

*Come, Holy Spirit, and complete your work of grace in me;
Enable _____ to recognise that you are working in them already.*

DAY 6

HELP

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Psalm 46:1-7 (NIV)

- 1 God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
- 2 Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
- 3 though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.
- 4 There is a river whose streams
make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
- 5 God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.
- 6 Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
- 7 The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

This is a rock-solid psalm, which reminds us of the spiritual:

I'm on my way to heaven, I shall not be moved.

Just as those who sang the old song sang it with hope in the face of the cruel and inhumane oppression of slavery, so this psalmist is not afraid *though the earth give way*. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could be that assured all the time!

Yet even in the psalms, we sometimes find a more wobbly attitude towards God. So in Psalm 107 sailors at sea praise God for his wonders but then become terrified in the storm: *in their peril their courage melted away*.

The challenge that the psalm presents us with is the challenge of spiritual resilience, especially when it feels a little like the end of the world as we know it (*though... the mountains fall into the heart of the sea*) and in the midst of political and economic turmoil (*Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall*). It is a psalm for our times, putting all our trust in God is the need for our times.

So it may be that your prayer today takes a slightly different form, asking God to give you the gift of faith that holds steady when everything else is falling apart. Pray for those who we yearn to know Christ for themselves. Pray too that you will dare to believe in a way that gives doubters, questioners and seekers confidence to search for your God who is your *ever-present help in trouble*.

*Come, Holy Spirit, and give me the gift of rock-solid faith;
May _____ see my faith in you and be inspired to search
for you and find faith in you.*

DAY 7

ADORE

JOURNEYING TOWARDS GOD

Psalm 84:1-4 (NIV)

- 1 How lovely is your dwelling-place,
Lord Almighty!
- 2 My soul yearns, even faints,
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.
- 3 Even the sparrow has found a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may have her young –
a place near your altar,
Lord Almighty, my King and my God.
- 4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
they are ever praising you.



We have grown accustomed to the idea that because God is everywhere, it doesn't matter where we meet him. A mountain is as good as a church, a bedroom as a shrine. Yet we are strangely drawn to special sites, places where we have experienced God's presence profoundly, calling them 'thin places'.

This psalm speaks of the temple in Jerusalem as just such a special site, the dwelling place of God. The writer's journey towards God's temple and altar is a journey towards the heart of God, a pilgrimage into God's presence. It is a psalm, not about buildings, important though they may be; but about intimacy, and the yearning for that intimacy of which we have already spoken. It is a song of invitation: 'Come with me,' it says, 'on a journey of discovery, of exploration, of meeting.'

During this season between Ascension and Pentecost, as we pray 'Thy Kingdom Come' for ourselves and for those we love, let us ask God to use us as letters of invitation to be sent towards those people he is calling, through whom they hear God's welcome perhaps for the very first time.

*Come, Holy Spirit, and show me the way to come home;
Show _____ that you are waiting for them
with outstretched arms.*



DAY 8

CELEBRATE

GOD'S ACCEPTANCE

Psalms 149:1-4 (NIV)

- 1 Praise the Lord.
Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.
- 2 Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;
let the people of Zion be glad in their King.
- 3 Let them praise his name with dancing
and make music to him with timbrel and harp.
- 4 For the Lord takes delight in his people;
he crowns the humble with victory.

God acts towards us in extraordinarily grace-filled and merciful ways. As Jos Moons says in *The Art of Spiritual Direction*, ‘God does not set entrance exams!’

Today’s psalm responds to this, by calling us to *praise, sing, rejoice, be glad, make music* because God *takes delight* in us and *crowns the humble with victory*. What does this mean? First, that God can still see the pattern of created beauty in us despite the cracks. Second, that he delights in loving us. Third, that he wills to set right all that is wrong in us. What a God!

This is a prayer invitation for us to think of the people who we are holding up in prayer in this way, to celebrate them in God’s presence as children, lovable and redeemable. We bless God for loving them and then ask that the door of their hearts might be opened to that love.

The second part of verse 4 is intriguingly different, reminding us that the greatest attribute in a person is their proper stance before God, the stance of humility, of creatureliness. Here lies the second invitation, to surrender our self-control to God. It may be that this is the most important prayer you ever pray for your friend, opening their hearts to a God who is able to bring them home and keep them safe.

*Come, Holy Spirit, and give me the strength to hold
———— up to you,
And make them discover your delight in them.*

DAY 9

SILENCE

REST AND SILENCE

Psalms 62:5-8 (NIV)

- 5 Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
My hope comes from him.
- 6 Truly he is my rock and my salvation,
He is my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
- 7 My salvation and my honour depend on God;
He is my mighty rock, my refuge.
- 8 Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him;
For God is our refuge.

This psalm reminds us that the starting and ending point of our relationship with God is not work but rest; or, as another version puts it, silence. In John's vision of heaven in Revelation 5, we are given the lovely image of our prayers (the prayers of the saints) as incense rising up to God from golden bowls held by the elders. The assurance that our prayers, having been prayed, go directly to God enables us to trust, because *our hope comes from God*.

The introduction to this Novena spoke about us listening in to the conversation of heaven through the means of the psalms. Now we come on the eve of Pentecost to the silence and stillness of heaven, where we are no longer listening or waiting but resting in God's presence. In this rest we enjoy the company of God, and offer our companionship to God in return.

When we find ourselves in that peaceful place, and time stands still, we remember two things. The first is that God and we are on the same side. Our concern and care (and sometimes worry) for those we carry in prayer is shared by God. We do not need to argue with God, even when we feel the need to shout out our prayers in desperation. The second is that spending time quietly in God's presence is transformative: often in this way our lives become effective witnesses to the peace and joy and love of heaven.

*Lord God, as I rest in your presence,
help me to hold _____ there;
Help _____ to experience your presence today.*



PENTECOST SUNDAY

THY KINGDOM COME

IN LOVE AND POWER

Psalms 104:1-4 (NIV)

- 1 Praise the Lord, my soul!
Lord my God, you are very great!
You are clothed with splendour and majesty,
- 2 The Lord wraps himself in light as with a garment,
He stretches out the heavens like a tent
- 3 and lays the beams of his upper chambers
on their waters.
He makes the clouds his chariot;
and rides on the wings of the wind;
- 4 He makes winds his messengers,
flames of fire his servants.

As we have come to the end of Thy Kingdom Come, it is fitting to return to the beginning of all things: the creation of the universe by God out of nothing. The psalm invites us to join together in worship of God our creator and provider, a hymn accompanying the story told in Genesis 1. On the day when we celebrate God's outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church, it is fitting to remember that the Spirit has been *hovering over the waters* since before the beginning of time, making and empowering the people of God.

Both Pentecost and the creation story remind us that it is the power of God which changes things and people, and it is the Spirit of God who turns those for whom we pray from darkness to light. We pray and God acts. How and when God acts is often mysterious to us, but it is not surprising that we cannot quite fathom the ways of an unimaginably great God who is clothed with splendour and majesty.

If we have learnt anything whilst journeying through the novena, it is that

- we recognise importance of prayer in our lives;
- God's will is to act in response, and to act gladly;
- so we trust God, even though we often don't understand.

Our hope is that this season of prayer will not only bring into the Kingdom of God those for whom you have prayed, but that it will have brought you yourself closer to God. For this you were created: in this may you live all the days of your life on earth. Glory be to God!

Father, thank you for your love:

draw my family and friends into that love.

Jesus, thank you for your gift of yourself:

help them to accept and appreciate that gift.

Holy Spirit, give them new life, and bring them home.



*For more about Thy Kingdom Come, events that
will be taking place, ways you can participate,
inspiring stories and further resources, visit*
THYKINGDOMCOME.GLOBAL