

## Hearing, learning, and following Jesus

One of the most important prayers you can pray for others is that God will reveal truth about Jesus in such a way that people truly meet Jesus and begin learning how to live a life in him. During this session we'll be praying with the Paul's words in Ephesians 4.

### Ephesians 4:17-18, 20

<sup>17</sup> ...walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind,

<sup>18</sup> being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God

because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart...

<sup>20</sup> ...But you did not learn Christ in this way...

### 1. To learn Christ is to be freed from a futility of mind (vss 17-20)

The word translated "learn" in verse 20 is the same word group behind the notion of becoming a "disciple." This way of learning means more than merely taking in facts. This learning, or discipling, means to be trained in a way of living. Whenever someone follows Christ as a faithful disciple, several key changes take place within them. Pray for God to move in the ways described in verse 18:

- **Bring light to what is darkened.** Pray for beams of God's light to penetrate the confusion that may dominate their way of thinking and understanding.
- **Bring life to what is deadened.** Pray that God would lift the ignorance and futility which separates them from his life-giving power.
- **Soften hearts that are hardened.** Pray that God would awaken new desires, loves and passions so that their minds might function clearly, free from futility and confusion, to value God's thoughts and ways.

### Ephesians 4:20-21

<sup>20</sup> But you did not learn Christ in this way,

<sup>21</sup> if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus...

### 2. To know Christ is to hear him and hear about him (vss 20-21)

Paul lists two ways Jesus influences people as his followers: clear teaching about Jesus, and personal encounter with Jesus. Both of these aspects of knowing and following Christ are important. Pray that they both become a daily reality for the person you are praying for.

- **Taught in Jesus: Ongoing learning.** Ask God to bring people into the life of your friend who will faithfully instruct them in the mindset and ways of Christ. Pray that your friend will be ready to take in new things. Pray that they will "unlearn" the habits of heart and confusion described in vs 17.
- **Hearing Jesus: Personal encounter.** To survive as follower of Christ, it's crucial to have a growing sense of personal relationship and communication with Christ. No mystical experience is required. To hear Christ in this sense is to respond to the risen Lord Jesus as if he were a living person.

### Ephesians 4:23-24

... <sup>23</sup> and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, <sup>24</sup> and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

### 3. To follow Christ is to live his life (vss 23-24)

- **A new mind.** Ask that God would bring a profound renewal, so that mind and spirit functioning together as God designed, with spiritual realities connected again with thoughts, emotions and desires.
- **A new self.** Ask God to make your friend all over again, so that they would know just know truth, but live truth in a lifestyle of righteousness and holiness.

#### How to use this prayer guide

Every issue of FreshPrayer is designed to help people pray for people who have yet to follow Jesus. The leader's guide contains ideas of how someone could facilitate a prayer gathering in which FreshPrayer is used. You have permission to make photocopies as needed for free distribution in your home or church. Some basics of effective prayer gatherings:

1. **Focus prayers on the lives of people who have yet to follow Christ.** Pray for more than their conversion. Pray for all the good things that God wants to bring about in their lives.
2. **Ground your prayers in scripture.** Take time to briefly discuss the passages of scripture so that they are freshly apprehended by participants. Urge them to find ways to articulate their own prayers following the ideas and language of the particular passage of scripture before you.
3. **Direct the prayer.** People will usually appreciate a bit of assertive leadership to facilitate the gathering. Use a variety of formats and styles. For example, during some of the gathering, form small groups helping more people pray. After a few rounds of prayer in small groups, you might call everyone together again, and ask one person to pray aloud with all others agreeing in prayer. Use your creativity and you'll find your fellow pray-ers will be glad you served them in this way.

Prayers about truth often focus on God somehow revealing the truths of the gospel. Paul's words in Ephesians focus on God transforming the inner workings of people's lives so that they are able to not only perceive truth, but to live as an authentic person, re-created from the inside out.

#### Talk about what you'll pray and who you'll pray for.

With most groups, the best way to help them start is to help them pre-meditate their prayers in two ways: Who will you pray for and what you will pray. Have each person name or describe a person who has yet to follow Christ that they would like to pray for. Help them develop their best prayers from Ephesians by facilitating a short discussion of Ephesians 4:17-24. Some possible discussion questions:

- Underline the times that the words "mind" or "truth" are used in the passage.  
Is truth something that is known, or lived out in relational behavior, or both?
- Is it possible to hear Christ as described in verse 21 without audibly hearing his voice?
- How do verses 23-24 take place on a timeline? Does this happen suddenly or slowly?  
How should our prayers be part of this process?

#### Pray in three "rounds."

The first section has to do with dealing with the patterns of the past. The second section has to do with an encounter with Christ. The third has to do with following Christ into a transformed future.

- **Hearing Christ.** One of the most meaningful ways of praying could be to enlarge prayers which have to do the kind of statements and invitations that Christ gives to people. Mention some of the things Christ said to people that we have in the Bible. Which of the words of Christ is he likely to voice to the one you are praying for? Imagine Jesus saying "Come to me," or "Believe me," or "Follow me." Jesus encountered frightened ones saying, "Don't be afraid; just believe." He pronounced forgiveness with kindness and power, saying "Son, your sins are forgiven." He imparted living peace with a word, saying, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Good prayers can be expressed from these words and many others.
- **Following Christ.** You'll find creative ways to pray with the double reality of a renewed mind and a recreated lifestyle. If the person you are praying for has ever been frustrated with Christianity, they can't have been walking in this kind of newness. Pray fervently for the fresh and real newness to come forth.