

A WORD ON THE GLOBAL PRAYER COMMUNITY GROUP

JOHN DAVIES

The global prayer community group has been global in several senses: The group has been comprised of members of many nations who have prayed for and covered a global scope of topics. It was even in some respects convened because of global prayer: Last summer I was in England praying for accommodation to make coming to Regent a possibility. Meanwhile another group member, then completely unknown to me, was in Vancouver praying for someone crazy enough to join the King Ed community house knowing that redevelopers had bought it and would evict everyone on an unknown date. So, the answer we got both made it possible for us both to be in the group and included what a realtor might call the “comprehensive Vancouver accommodation experience package,” or less obliquely, eviction on April Fool’s Day but sadly no mere practical joke. This shows that in our real-life world God answers prayer in a way that is effective even if it looks messy. Seeing an answer to global prayer is a helpful encouragement because the nature of the subject matter means we’re unlikely normally to witness them. The belief that prayer would nevertheless make a practical difference was one of the things that motivated me to join the group. A variety of motivations emerged following discussion with other group members: These included interest in global mission allied to the belief that prayer is something we can and should do to help, and the belief that it’s important to cultivate a global perspective and to seek relevant information and inspiration. That it is important for theological students to avoid retreating into a subculture. We won’t be here forever and need to prepare ourselves for whatever might be next. Prayer and community also bring a holistic balance to the inevitable academic focus at Regent.

Typically, the format was that different group members volunteered to lead a session each week. This involved teaching about a particular region and situation, which made it possible for everyone in the group to articulate specific, informed prayers. But we were flexible and open to praying for pressing issues not always related to global prayer. Before the meeting we usually ate lunch together, giving the group a social dimension. Thanks to a sponsor, this culminated in a group lunch at the appropriately global venue, “So Hyang Korean Cuisine” (yum, recommended!)

Topics included several firsthand accounts from group members who had done the mission work described: Cambodia with its heart wrenching stories of sex trafficking set against the encouragement that God is working in such dark places. We prayed for the continued fruitfulness of the agencies working to bring light, hope and justice; Nepal and prayer for persecuted Christians, a manifestation of God’s power, discipleship, and biblical resources and for the Hong Kong diaspora

to know Jesus; Madagascar and the need for Bibles and material in local languages; Kenya, focusing on explosive church growth and continued development of quality Christian higher education. Other topics we learned about and prayed for included Korea—the recent loss and increasing loss of genuine spirituality (despite Korea’s reputation), excessive pressure on youth leading to massive suicide rates and the faithfulness of church in North Korea despite extreme persecution; the Muslim world—including the historically unprecedented turning to Christ of Muslims, entailing, for example, underground church growth and persecution in Iran, Boko Haram violence in northern Nigeria, and developing resources for Muslim background believers globally in many languages and formats (e.g. phone apps); Europe—pressures on freedom of speech and the mixed picture of both widespread post-Christian secularisation, with the pressing need for re-evangelisation and patchy signs of new spiritual life; US-China relations; Afghanistan, Yemen and particularly Ukraine were also prayed for.

Members appreciated the group for a variety of reasons. These included enjoying getting to know people, especially a very international group—Hong Kong, Korea, China, Canada, the UK, Ivory Coast and Congo all being represented, including people at different stages of life having had varied life experiences. Some particularly appreciated being able to open up and feel accepted. For others it was the part of the week they looked forward to most, leaving them feeling infused with spiritual strength. Appreciation was expressed that we learned so much about different countries and situations around the world and what Holy Spirit is doing, which was motivating and fuelled inquisitiveness to know more. The comment was made that it brought about a realisation of how little we know and how small our perspective on the kingdom.

It was noted that everyone in the group had their different perspectives, each person having eyes to see and pray about different aspects of the same prayer topic. So, our diverse community resulted in a fuller picture and expression of God’s work. Despite the diversity, we were carrying the same general burden for issues mainly unrelated to our own lives or contexts, resulting in a sense of community. Some felt that the ability of group to pray heartfelt prayers for unknown places was striking.

Everyone is welcome to come and join us!



“That church made me feel like I was in a toothpaste commercial.”
-Overheard at Regent

KEEPING DEPRESSION HIDDEN

DANIEL MELVILL JONES

In my last column for *Et Cetera*, I shared my experience of struggling through an intense season of depression. Since then, several students have approached me, thanking me for sharing my story and confiding their own current struggles with the dark dog of depression. In my next couple articles, I would like to share some further thoughts sparked by my reflections on these conversations and on my own experience.

After opening about my story, friends and acquaintances would repeatedly say “I had no idea you were struggling with this. You always seem like such a happy and outgoing person!” Yet I noticed that several of the students who confessed to me their ongoing struggle with depression also have outgoing and cheerful personalities. Of course, depression can haunt all personality types, so I don’t want to claim that some of us struggle more than others. But I do expect that those of us with outgoing personalities have an especially hard time revealing our inner anguish to those around us.

I first realized this about myself when I was studying Madeleine Thien’s novel *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* in university, a sprawling epic in which three Chinese families navigate the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. One of the main characters is Jiang Kai, a talented musician whose buoyant personality masks his inner turmoil. When Kai’s depression drives him to commit suicide, his death is a shock to his friends but not to the reader who has come to know his complex inner nature.

It was while we were reading this book in university that I first began to reckon with my own struggle with suicidal ideation. I bravely confessed this to my prof after one of our classes. She looked at me with a new compassion in her eyes, saying “Daniel, you are like Kai!” Thanks to the understanding that novel brought, I began to recognize myself in a new way.

When I’m under a spell of depression, I find it very hard to reveal that struggle to those around me. Instead, I often retreat to the safety of my confident and outgoing personality. The pain inside is too fragile and raw for me to openly acknowledge. My inner life is an ugly mess of grief and confusion, so I would prefer to take solace in the side of me that I know and prefer.

I love joy! I want to be known for spreading joy, even when I am feeling very little of it. I’m good at making others feel upbeat cheerful. To do so when I feel anything but is often the only way for me to offset my own pain.

When I was a young child, my mum sewed me miniature stuffed versions of all the characters from A. A. Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh* books. I still have them today, well-worn and faded with love. If you are familiar with Winnie the Pooh, you may remember that the grey donkey, Eeyore, is such a permanently melancholy creature that his very name has come to define that character trait. Yet I begged my mum to sew a permanent smile onto my Eeyore. I could not tolerate the thought of him being sad. Like my stuffed, smiling Eeyore, I can rarely tolerate the thought of myself being sad.

Yet stitching a permanent smile over pain is no way to find healing. Like Kai, that approach will only drive me to despair. The pain needs to be acknowledged and seen by others for me to begin my journey towards healing.

That is why I am so thankful for those who have insisted on entering my inner life, no matter how untidy and unjoyful it often is. To be sure, not everyone ought to be granted such access so there are times when I am grateful for my smokescreen of cheerfulness. Yet the friends who have dug deeper than the surface and who were willing to bear witness to my pain are truly a Godsend. First and foremost is my wife Annie, but this circle of friends was by no means limited to her. I need a group of people who I can trust enough to be vulnerable amongst. We all do.

If your personality is like mine and you struggle with depression, I hope you can still find those in your circle who can be trusted. I hope you have the courage to reveal your hurt to them. This can be the first step of a long journey by which the love of God and the recourses of physiology can bring you healing. The vulnerability and honesty you begin cultivating with these friends will be an invaluable part of that process.

If you are friends with those of us who have outgoing personalities, don’t take our confidence or cheerfulness for granted. Please find the time and ways to ask how we are really doing and expect an honest answer. May we be a community who learns to bear one another’s burdens so that we can show each other the love and healing of Christ.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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Visual art must be submitted in digital format. No promises can be made about the quality of printing, but black and white line art will reproduce best.

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NEW TESTAMENT FIGURES AS PROJECT GROUP MEMBERS
 DRYDEN DEMCHUK

Some of my personal favourite moments in the gospels come when Jesus' frustration with the disciples becomes obvious, and you can just hear the patience in his voice running out. I mean, imagine travelling around by foot with your twelve closest friends, evangelising for three years without any of them totally understanding what the mission even is in the first place. Tensions and disagreements are bound to show up eventually. Thinking about this is what first led me to imagine the early days of the gospel as the most universally hated school assignment on earth – the dreaded group project. If some of Jesus' earliest followers ended up in your group for a school assignment, here's how I imagine it would go:

The professor posts the groups online. Nobody has gotten to choose their partners, and nobody is thrilled with the results. But within only a matter of minutes group chats are being formed, google docs are being shared, and meetings are being arranged. You've ended up with a few guys who you haven't gotten to know before, but the group of them seem to already be friends. They're an odd bunch – long-haired, really into fishing, and quite possibly homeless - but they're known for being friends with everyone around campus and you figure it could be worse, so you show up to your first group meeting with moderate expectations.

Peter – Well-meaning but unreliable

First, there's Peter. Not only does he show up to the group meeting looking sleep deprived with an obvious case of the coffee jitters, but he's obviously gone all-in on preparations. He's got google docs, PowerPoint slides, peer-reviewed sources, and presentation talking points galore. He's visibly proud of his work and excited to share it with you guys, bringing his backpack into the library like a Golden Retriever bringing a muddy tennis ball back to his human. But that's just the problem... Peter's proverbial tennis ball is, well, also muddy. The sources he's collected are hardly relevant to the topic, his PowerPoint slides are all in comic-sans, and even though he's prepared with talking points for the presentation, he absolutely freezes whenever anyone asks him a question or challenges any of his points. But at least he's got a willing heart.

Paul – Joins the group late and kind of takes over

When Paul messages you asking to be added to your group chat, you're confused. You're pretty sure Paul was in one of the other groups. Is he trying to spy on you guys? Get some ideas from you to take back to his group? What's the deal? But then you get an email from the professor – Paul wanted to change topics and so the professor let him join your group late. It doesn't take long for Paul to show his worth. After all, he's seen the other side and knows how bad the other

groups have it. He's excited to be part of what you guys have started and throws himself into it head-first.

Judas – Steals your idea and takes credit for it

You make a comment to Judas in passing one day about how it might be good to use Prezi instead of PowerPoint to add a little pizzazz. At the next group meeting, Judas suggests using Prezi. Everyone's stoked on the idea and thanks Judas for his wonderful contribution. He never admits it was your idea originally. Friggin Judas.

John – Doesn't help a whole bunch but afterwards acts like he was the only one who contributed

John wasn't exactly a hindrance to the project, he did some work and showed up to all the meetings, but he wasn't exactly the star of the show either. But then it comes time for everyone to fill out their peer assessments. To hear John tell the story, you'd think he was the only one who did anything. He accuses Peter of being slow, he calls himself "the Beloved Group Member", and he seems to recall numerous group activities that nobody else remembers (no, John, nobody else remembers meeting up with this "Lazarus" guy). But he does at least try to make his friend Jesus look pretty good at the end of everything.

Jesus – Vanishes for a bit but comes through at the end

This Jesus guy seems a bit odd. He doesn't reeeceaaaaalllly seem to be getting any work done but he seems confident that things will get done somehow. Sometimes he gets frustrated with the group and goes outside to lay on the lawn by himself, and yet it sort of feels like he's the only one who would want to keep being friends with you even after the project is done. He's promised to prepare the group's slides before the presentation date, but as the date approaches, he kinda drops off the map. Three days before the date, he's nowhere to be seen, won't respond to any texts, but he's promised you that he'll be there for the presentation. The morning of, you still haven't heard from him and you're panicking. That is, you're panicking until minutes before class when your phone vibrates... a link has been shared with you. It's a link to the most gorgeous Prezi presentation you have ever seen, and it comes with a full google doc of supporting points and information. This is more help than you could have ever expected, and it came from someone who appeared to have ditched you entirely. You still have no idea where Jesus is or how he pulled this off, but he came through for you without a minute to spare and your entire GPA is saved (Even if Peter did kind of botch his part of the presentation).

A COLLEGE COLLECT
 STEVEN GOMEZ, CLASS OF 2021

Almighty God, who laid the earth's foundations with wisdom, lifted up the sky with understanding, and sent Your Son to be our Teacher, grant Your grace to this college and its community which has in these days known the frustration of disappointed hopes, the conflict of different perspectives, and the shock of sudden loss.

For students facing deadlines for assignments they don't understand, may You give the gift of fellowship as a reminder that they're not alone; for every incomprehensible reading, a beautiful phrase that articulates Your truth; for every boring lecture, a lively discussion that sparks connections and insight. Speak to their hearts and minds, O Lord, and remind them that the joy of following You is worth more than grades or intelligence.

For faculty facing the challenge of teaching people of many cultures, traditions, and ages, may You give the willingness to listen and honesty in what they do not know; for the unending tasks of grading, the grace to be fair-minded and encouraging in feedback; for the minutiae of planning courses, wisdom in methods and clarity of instruction. Teach these teachers, O Lord, how to be flexible yet faithful that they may be professors of Your gospel and not merely a subject.

For staff who work in the library, bookstore, and buried-out-of-sight offices, may You give the gift of servant hearts in their essential business; for long days spent at computer screens, the gift of comfort for sore backs and weary eyes; for dealing with difficult situations, the grace of calm and understanding so that tensions can be eased. Be with them in their labours, O Lord, that they may find true enjoyment in work that often goes unnoticed and sometimes unthanked.

I lift up to You this school and all who work, study, and visit here, and ask that You may be present to them even in the midst of long days, heavy loads, and stresses from the other parts of life. Give strength, inspiration, rest, and peace that Your light may shine even far beyond this place, and make this college one of the many ways that You are building Your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven; for the glory of the Father who knows all things, the Son who reveals all truth, and the Spirit who guides in all wisdom, living and reigning as One God, now and forever. Amen.

BE NOT DECEIVED
 JERUSA LIEOW

Be not deceived

In times of peace

Forget not the evil heart

Hearts, capable of tearing apart

Hesitation, both a blessing and a curse

Choosing between the bad and the worse

Mercy, nowhere to be seen

The sorrows that follow

Wherever they've been

Put not your mind to ease

But pray

Not repay

Say,

"May my paths be made straight"

The LORD makes my Lord's enemies

A footstool for His feet

Between soon

And not a moment too soon

DAD JOKE OF THE WEEK*

How do you think the unthinkable?

With an itheberg.

**Et Cetera guarantees that its Dad Jokes are authentic samples of paternal humour provided on a regular basis by the Editor's own father.*

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