

Hear Our Prayers

AC ANGLICAN CHURCH OF PAPHOS

Lent Course 2026 **Hear Our Prayers**

Week 4 **ESTHER Communal Prayer**

17 March 2026 - Revd Lesley Carr

This week, our Old Testament companion is the courageous Queen of Persia, a Jew, who saved her people from persecution and death at the hands of the wicked Haman. **Esther 4: 9-17** As we reflect on Esther and her life as Queen, our theme is communal prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. So, who do you think would be the best company to be in to learn about communal prayers?
2. Is this something we can learn to do from reading about it, or is it something we learn when we are doing it?
3. What prompts you to pray

What does this mean, and how can we grow by praying in the company of others? If you wanted to get fit, you would be unlikely to seek the advice of a couch potato who spends their time watching Netflix and eating pizza. You would find a fit person to be your trainer. And you would think the same rule should apply to prayer. If you want to grow in your life of prayer, find someone who does a lot of praying, who brings the wisdom of experience, who has lived through some of the pitfalls and setbacks.

Choosing Esther may seem an odd choice of person for a course on prayer. Because there seem to be very few occasions in which Esther actually prays. I'm sure she did. It is just that, apart from some fasting, her own praying life is not actually recorded in the scripture. How can we learn about prayer from Esther when we have so little evidence of her prayer life? The answer lies in Chapter 4. Before we read chapter 4, here is some background to this story.

Background Information

Esther is a Jewish woman who has become queen to the mighty Persian King Ahasuerus; she is a beautiful, popular, and well-favoured wife and queen. But there is a powerful official called Haman who has paid a massive wad of cash to the king in return for the right to destroy the Jews across the empire, so furious is he that Mordecai, Esther's adoptive father, would not bow to him. There is a massive power pull here, the king had been married to Queen Vashti a beautiful Queen; but she refused to come before her King when he summoned her, this was seen by the king as a deliberate act of disobeying his

Authority, challenging his ego and power status, this would have made the king furious and Vashti was 'relieved of her duties' so to speak. This paved the way for Esther. So, a Jewish Queen in a vast gentile empire. Haman is plotting to kill the Jews, and only Esther has the power to intervene. But doing so places her in danger. Here is the conversation between her and Mordecai, her stepfather and a Jewish leader, when she describes this risk. Esther 4: 9-17

Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Then Esther spoke to Hatach and gave him a message for Mordecai saying, All the king's servants and the people of the Kings provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the court without being called, there is but one law – all alike are to be put to death. Only if the King holds out the golden sceptre to someone may that person live. I myself have not, night or day, been called to come in to the king for thirty days.

When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, Mordecai told them to reply to Esther. 'Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who Knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for such a time as this.

Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai. Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days night or day. I and my maids will all fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish. Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

So, it's looking really bad for the Jews. And their only hope is the influence of Esther. But she has a problem. She can't just stroll up to Ahasuerus and say, 'Hey how's it going? What about sparing my people from destruction?' If she does that, she risks death. The law is that she must wait for Ahasuerus to summon her, by which time it may be too late. So, Mordecai challenges Esther to act. 'Who knows?' he asks. 'Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for such a time as this?' And so, Esther urges the people to pray.

They mourn and weep and fast. There is a mighty wave of prayer for their rescue. And when Esther plucks up the courage to go to the king, she is well received and through her actions the people are saved.

- What is it that gives Esther strength and the courage to approach the king
- What does Esthers story teach us about Prayer
- Whatever Esther's own prayer life may be, the important thing is that the community gets behind her. It is the prayer of the community that protects her and saves the people.
- How does this happen

And this brings us to a critical truth about the life of prayer which is that it is a communal activity. We pray not as individuals but as a Church. Even when you pray alone you are not praying on your own. You are part of a mighty army of prayer, which is God's people in every time and place.

I hold a home bible group, and in conjunction with the Lent course we too are studying 'prayer' and even for those that find praying publicly uncomfortable, or can't quite find the words, was encouraged to pray a short prayer for the person sat next to them. I think it is safe to say they found it easier than they thought.

In Chapter 11 of Luke's Gospel, Jesus has once again been off praying by himself. But the disciples come after him and say, 'Lord, teach us to pray.' And so, he teaches them, 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.' He teaches them what today we know as the Lord's prayer, a communal prayer that all can say together. Jesus builds a praying community. And we know that they continued to pray together, because after the Resurrection, the community Jesus built was united by its common life of prayer. They pray together in the Upper Room as they await the Spirit's gift at Pentecost.

In the Book of Acts, the new community devotes itself, 'To the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.' And in moments of crisis, in prison or under persecution, they turn to each other and pray together. The Church that Jesus institutes is a praying community. We live in an increasingly individualistic culture.

How many of us presume faith to be a personal and private matter and so prayer is something that happens purely between God and the individual believer. But whenever you pray, what you are doing is uniting yourself with the unceasing prayers of the heavenly host. When you pray, you are in the company of thousands of millions of saints, alive and dead, and through your prayer you become one family with them.

And that communal dimension to prayer brings such rich joy. For me, that is demonstrated most clearly in times of pain and suffering. Esther was living in the most terrible danger so she needed the prayer of the whole community.

There are times when all of us maybe in a situation like that. I have been through times in my life when I have felt so overwhelmed that I have barely been able to pray - I just can't concentrate or find the words.

Many Christians have found benefit in gathering together as part of a small group to pray, and many churches have benefited from a small group of people who want to go deeper in prayer. It is important that a small group is an inclusive one and it needs to be set up under the authority of the local church and advertised regularly.

In terms of what a group does, it is up to you. It is important to have some time to share, listen to each other's news and build each other up. Some groups root their time together in the Daily Office or in a passage of scripture. You may use silence, or words, or both to pray. You will certainly want to have times of extempore prayer.

A second place to grow in communal prayer is the family, though this may be difficult for some, our church family is an obvious place to do this. This is also a place where children are taught to pray and where God is placed at the centre of family life.

So, are there ways your family can become more a place of prayer? Saying grace before a meal and praying together at the end of the day are simple ways of doing that. It is impossible to pray alone. All prayer draws us into the body of Christ. What a joy it is to pray as part of a vast family of Christians.

This week, as you pray communally, draw strength from that family so that, like Esther, you can be reassured your prayers are heard in unison.

So, before we finish in communal prayer, let us take a minute to pray for each other, turn to the person on your right, and say a short prayer, saying thank you to God, and what you would hope for that person in the coming weeks or months. Take a few minutes chatting to that person and ask them what they would like praying for.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you find it easier to pray alone or with others?
2. Many people say, 'I don't need to go to church. I can just pray in my own home. How would you answer them
3. Are there times when you have been especially aware of others praying for you? Can you try to describe this to the group, if you feel able
4. Which are the parts of an act of worship that most draw you into prayer?
5. What are the times and places when you pray with others? How might you add to these?

Lord Jesus, as you taught your disciples, so teach us to pray. Give us honesty in our confession, ambition in our intercession, eloquence in our praise and humility in our thanksgiving. Help us to trust in the power of prayer, and as we pray, give us renewed joy in the hope of your salvation. For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit one God for ever and ever. AMEN.



W paphosanglicanchurch.org
P 99 103976 E churchsecretary04@gmail.com
FB [facebook.com/Anglican Church of Paphos](https://www.facebook.com/AnglicanChurchofPaphos)
1 Chrysopolitissa Street, Kato Paphos 8041, Paphos, Cyprus