

Please share Presbytery Prayer News with your congregation

April 2022 Prayer News

PRAYER TOPICS FOR THE MONTH

This month pray that you will see Christ with you in the middle of all that is going on

Week start	April prayer topics
3	Pray for Fiona Smith as she prepares to leave Ness Bank to become the Principal Clerk. Pray for Ness Bank, too, that the Lord will be with them
10	In this Holy Week remember all that Jesus suffered for you. Ask him to open your eyes to what he did for you by the things he suffered.
17	Rejoice that Jesus is risen! Death is put to death. Because he is alive for evermore he shows that all he suffered was not in vain. He is the conqueror and the King of all kings, even of the king of terror.
24	Pray for Mike Robertson as he takes up his new position as hospital chaplain at Raigmore Hospital. Pray, too, for the Barn congregation that the Lord will be with them in vacancy.

Contact inverness@churchofscotland.org.uk with your prayer news.

Abandoned?

On the cross Jesus experienced great loss. He felt, and cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It was our sin that nailed Jesus to the cross, whereupon he found himself forsaken. We are so used to it that we cannot easily know what it must be like to be abandon by God because of sin. What often awakens us is when things do not go as we expect or plainly make us think that God has abandoned us in a time of pain.

Something as simple as losing our keys creates anxiety and unsettles us until they are found. We feel incapacitated, and uncertain which way to turn. The loss of a job triggers fears, insecurities and doubts, and the feeling of being abandoned by God. The loss of someone dear creates an even deeper sense of desperation, and a longing that is never fulfilled.

Jesus’ disciples lost him when he died on the cross. It was a devastating blow to them. They despaired. The two on the road to Emmaus told Jesus, whom they did not recognise, “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. “ (Luke 24:19-21). What a calamity!

In John 20:1-18, Mary and the disciples were reeling from their loss. Not only did they lose Jesus to death, but they soon discovered his body is now missing too.

Things were going from bad to worse. This was one more loss to compound their sadness.

Simon Peter and the other disciple looked into the tomb, saw the strips of linen and Jesus’ burial cloth, and accepted it as evidence that Jesus’ body was gone. Scripture tells us they went home—despondent.

But Mary, seeing the same evidence, stayed awhile longer. She stood outside the tomb crying. It seems that she couldn’t quite bring herself to leave. She grieved with tears.

And then the story turned. Mary didn’t recognise Jesus immediately. He looked different. He wasn’t the crucified version that she had lost. Mary was looking for a beaten and battered body. Jesus showed up differently than she expected, and she didn’t recognise him at first.

When we feel abandoned by God or experience loss, do we leave or do we grieve? Do you look for Jesus or assume he’s gone because things seem to be going so wrong?

Too many times in our life we’ve allowed loss or suffering to lead us to believe we were abandoned by God. When a circumstance didn’t turn out the way we hoped or we lost someone or something valuable, we assumed God was gone too. But time and time again we discover that he is there. He might look different or

behave differently than we thought he would, but he is there.

So often in our lives, we fixate on what we've lost rather than seeing what we've found. God is there but we do not see him. He is always in our circumstances. He might look a little different than we expected and we miss him. He might show up in a different way than you hoped, but he is there, but we do not see him.

With all the shaking that is going on, particularly in the church we can feel abandoned by God. Look closely, though. Maybe he is there just waiting for you to rediscover him in a new situation. Always he wants us to trust him that however it may seem he does not abandon us.

We are all facing some kind of trial just now that we would rather avoid. Jesus shrank from going to the cross. "If it is possible, take this cup from me," he prayed. But he quickly added, "Nevertheless, your will be done." We are not so keen to add that last bit.

Our stamina is being tested right now and our faith is being stretched—and it hurts. It's in these trials when it's human nature to bury ourselves in anxiety, worry, and depression, wondering how and if we will ever get through what we're facing.

It can feel like God is either nowhere to be found or standing over us like a schoolteacher waiting to see if we will make it through the test. It can be confusing as to why we feel uneasy in our soul if God is a God of peace, grace, and love—but we are uneasy.

There is no shortage of situations in this world that threaten to overwhelm us. We are anxious over our circumstances: building closures, unions, no minister, finances, and even guilt and shame for what was done or not done in the church long ago.

We *worry* over plans and expectations: our mission, social status, measuring up, doing something meaningful, and receiving praise or notoriety in the community. Some are lost in a season of depression: feelings of despondency, dread, or deep pain caused by loss, broken promises, or toxic relationships.

It all begs the question: "God, is this a test?" This is a natural question of those of us who are trying to figure out why God would allow us to feel anxiety, worry, or depression, and to have to face what we are facing.

Not many of us like tests. We would do anything other than to have to face them. Did you have to be issued with a test at school and you had to go to the principal's office on your own to take it? You sat by yourself without anyone there to make you tense, but you were—or you had the principal keep pacing up and down, and coming and looking over your shoulder. We don't like it when we feel like we're being evaluated.

Yet, it only makes sense that God can test us. There is no reason why our Creator can't have the right to look into my mind, which he created, or into our heart, which he also created, and perceive the angst inside of us. But we don't have to be afraid of God testing our heart; rather, we can welcome the chance to be intimately known by him.

From the very beginning, Satan has pushed the idea of God as a principal looking critically at us—a miser who says 'no!' all the time because he doesn't want us to be wise or happy or fulfilled. He ignores our prayers because he isn't good and he doesn't love us. Don't fall for this scam and fake news.

Jesus attacks this lie head-on following the promises of Matthew 7:9–11. Jesus basically asks, "Do you have kids? OK. Do you love seeing the smile on their faces when you surprise them with a gift? Does it warm your

heart when they ask you for something good, because they trust you and believe you'll give it to them?

If you answered all these questions yes, it's because you're a good dad or mom. But here's the rub: there is a Father in heaven who is infinitely better than you. Compared to him, you are *evil*" (Matt. 7:11).

As Matthew Henry put it:
If all the compassions of all the tender fathers in the world were crowded into the [heart] of one, yet compared with the tender mercies of our God, they would be but as a candle to the sun, or a drop to the ocean.

That's why he loves to give good gifts to his children. Because he's the good Father *par excellence*. He never abandons us, and will never test us beyond our breaking point. In whatever comes to us, he wants us to trust him that he is always wanting the highest good for us, and that we need not fear or be anxious.

The apostle Paul assures us in his letter to the Romans, that nothing can separate us from the love of God towards us that are in Christ Jesus. God will not stop loving us and wanting the absolute best for us—even when we cannot understand why things are happening and there is even pain.

Now that things seems to be moving back to nearer normal Prayer News will also move back to nearer normal from the next edition.

Alves & Burghead, Urquhart & Glenmoriston, Inverness East, Daviot & Dunlichity, and Kinloss & Findhorn congregations are invited to submit items for prayer and thanksgiving by April 22.