



First Friday of the Month Call to Prayer February 2017

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. Romans 8:26 ESV

Welcome to our February 2017 First Friday Call to Prayer. Our aim is to provide you with teaching that we trust will be an encouragement to you. We will also provide you with praise items and prayer requests coming from within ANiC, ACNA and the Anglican Communion.

<p>We encourage you to set aside the first Friday, February 6th, as a day of prayer and fasting for the Church in these critical days, ideally gathering with other believers in your parish or region for corporate prayer at some point in the day.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Prayer Quotes</p> <p><i>"I am deeply convinced that the necessity of prayer, and to pray unceasingly, is not as much based on our desire for God as on God's desire for us. It is God's passionate pursuit of us that calls us to prayer."</i> Henri Nouwen 1932-1996</p>
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“Yes, but . . .”

“I know that Jesus died for my sins and all that, but what, if anything, does that have to do with how I fill out my income tax return?”

“The Word says that Jesus “will supply all my need”, but just in case He doesn’t, I’d better have a backup plan.”

“Trusting God is all very well, but what happens if it doesn’t work?”

“Prayer is important and good, I suppose, but let’s be practical here in figuring out how we’re going to meet our church budget.”

Have you ever said, either out loud or under your breath, any of the above? Have you had conversations with Christian friends who have shared similar doubts? Many of us have known people who always seem to be saying, “That’s all very well, but . . .” or some version of simply, “Yes, but . . .” Having been in Christian ministry since the 1960’s, I have learned more subtle ways of expressing these feelings – ways that don’t betray my struggle to actively remember and to choose to believe the clear promises of Scripture. Any feelings of “yes, but...” that arise in me I keep to myself lest I dampen another’s faith and boldness. We want to believe the promises of God which the Gospel says are part of our inheritance as children of God, but really it’s less scary to pray safe, conservative prayers that have low expectations of being answered. No risk? Then no disappointment, right?

As I’ve been pondering these things over the past week, I have been reminded of the life of Abraham as recorded in Genesis. Here is a man on a spiritual pilgrimage as well as an actual journey, and there are three incidents in his life story that demonstrate the importance of moving beyond the *yes-buts* in our relationship with the Living God.

In chapter 12, God has called Abram (his name before God changed it) to leave his father’s home in Ur and travel to an unknown land that God would show him. The writer of Hebrews tells us that he was “looking forward to the city whose designer and builder is God” (Heb. 11: 10 ESV). He didn’t know where he was going, but he’d know for sure when he got there! Quite amazing trust demonstrated. No *yes-buts* here.

A massive famine interrupted his travel plans, and so Abram and his wife, Sarai, headed for Egypt where there is available food for sojourners. As they approached Egypt, a ‘*what if*’ popped into Abram’s mind. “What if Pharaoh and his nobles find Sarai so desirable that they decide to kill me? Okay, I can trust God enough for me to take my entire family, leave our home and set off to God-only-knows-where

(literally), but to protect us from harm while we sojourn in Egypt to escape the famine? Maybe we'd better have an alternative plan, just in case."

So, he instructed Sarai to tell the Egyptians that she is not Abram's wife but his sister. Like most plan B's, this one almost ended in disaster. When Pharaoh ultimately discovered the truth, he was furious and immediately required Abram to leave the region where they had been dwelling and prospering.

On several occasions, God spoke to Abram about his future – promising through a solemn covenant that he would have an heir, and many offspring that would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. Hard to believe, given that Sarai was barren and was long beyond the age of childbearing. In chapter 12, we read of Abraham's second *yes-but*. "Yes, God has promised me a son, but it's taking so long and Sarai is sure not getting any younger!" So, he conceived a child with Sarai's servant, Hagar, and Ishmael was born. Abram loved his son, but he was not the son of Promise. God's covenant promise was not to be fulfilled through him. The implications of Abram's decision to help God out did not deter Him from ultimately keeping His promise, but it did create severe difficulties for the future of the region.

Then, in perhaps the most famous event in Abraham's life, the sacrificing of Isaac, the son of Promise, we find in chapter 22 an Abraham freed from the *yes-buts*. God spoke to him and told him to take his son, Isaac, in whom all the promises of future generations lay, and sacrifice the lad to the Lord. You know the story, but let's try and put ourselves into the mind of a man who had a history of *yes-buts*. As they climbed the mountain, might not his mind have been desperately trying to find a strategy, a plan B, to save his son? Maybe God's got it wrong this time. Maybe I misinterpreted what it was that God was asking!

Again, the writer of Hebrews gives us some insight into Abraham's thinking which the Genesis account does not include: "*He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back*" (Heb. 11:19 ESV). He had learned enough of the faithfulness of his God to believe that, even if the Lord allowed him to go through with the sacrifice, He would raise Isaac from the dead. Of course, God did halt him in time and provided a ram for the sacrifice instead. But Abraham's growing trust in the Word of the Lord meant that there were no *yes-buts*, no plan B's.

You may well be saying, "Thanks for the Sunday School lesson, but what does any of this have to do with prayer or me specifically". I'm really glad that you asked! As we've been looking at Abraham's struggle to overcome the *yes-buts*, some of our own struggles in prayer may well have come to mind - those opportunities to pray for someone's need after church that we let pass in case they might be offended or, even worse, if we prayed for them and nothing happened! Perhaps our prayers are couched into a vague, generalized blessing that sound good, but are really covering up hidden *yes-buts* of doubt that rob us of boldness in prayer.

All of these may be true, but, frankly, I'm really after something else this month. I'm after the *yes-buts* in our minds that feed us false narratives about our identity and worthiness to pray at all.

Back in our December 2016 Call to Prayer, in an article entitled *Reluctant to Pray* (found [here](#), if you missed it), we talked about how our shame and guilt, lurking just below the surface, can make us uncomfortable in the presence of God, robbing us of a fruitful prayer life. "*We suffer from what someone has called 'Gospel amnesia' – we have forgotten all that God has accomplished for us through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of our Saviour, Jesus. We all need to be reminded, over and over, time and time again, not just to have a tidy theology, but to actually apply all the truth of the Gospel to our everyday situations*"

With all my heart, I believe that, as we remind ourselves of all that Jesus has provided for us, we will experience fewer *yes-buts*. We will stop believing the false narratives that say, "Real transformation is not possible for **you**! Maybe for some others, but certainly not you! You'll just need to go on struggling to barely survive in your Christian life!" Or perhaps, it's something like, "You don't want to be known as a *fanatic*, do you? You're carrying this prayer thing much too far. People in the church are beginning to talk!"

Then, there is the sort of lie that says, "Some of the promises in Scripture are true, but certainly, not all of them. Take that business of your being "dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:12). You can't really take that seriously. That's just a mystical, theological concept!"

The list of false narratives that we can easily end up believing is long, but one of the Scripture passages that we can and must build our foundations of faith on is this:

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.
2 Corinthians 1: 20 NIV

Let’s decide, even right now before you pray, to choose to believe what God says about us in His Word, rather than what others say, our own thoughts say, or what the lies of the enemy say about us. As a pastor friend of mine likes to say, “Because the gospel is true, we’re never alone, never condemned, never unloved, never undesirable, never shamed, never forsaken!”

There are no *yes-buts* in the promises of God, because there are no *yes-buts* in Jesus! Amen!

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Praise God ...

- For the many **wonderful promises given to us in Scripture** that shape our inheritance as God’s adopted sons and daughters.
- For the **reformation God is working out** in global Anglicanism – and the entire Christian Church. In the midst of chaos, He is building His Kingdom and refining His bride, the Church.
- For **faithful Anglican primates, bishops, clergy and laity** – throughout the Communion – who are standing for truth even when their stand for Christ and His Word makes them targets of attack. Especially we praise the Lord for the continuing faithful witness by the GAFCON primates.

Please pray...

- For our primate **Archbishop Foley Beach** (& Allison) – Pray for great wisdom, discernment, courage and strength as he gives leadership to ACNA, particularly in the light of a **newly inaugurated US president and federal government**.
- For **Bishop Charlie Masters** (& Judy) – Pray for our diocesan bishop as he provides guidance and leadership of ANiC. May God grant him renewed courage, wisdom and vision. Pray also for physical protection and good health in the midst of his heavy travel schedule.
- For **Bishop Don Harvey** (& Trudy) – Pray for Bishop Don in his roles as ANiC’s episcopal vicar and senior chaplain to the ACNA College of Bishops.
- For **ANiC’s suffragan bishops**: Stephen Leung (& Nona) and Trevor Walters (& Dede). Pray for discernment, energy and grace as they care for their clergy and congregations. Also pray for Bishops Ron Ferris (church planting in Langley, BC) and Malcolm Harding (retired in Brandon, MB).
- For our **Archdeacons**: the Venerables Ron Corcoran (Vancouver Island), Dan Gifford (BC), Bruce Chamberlayne (Alberta & BC Interior), Paul Charbonneau (Ontario), Tim Parent (Ottawa Valley), Paul Crossland (Prairies), Michael McKinnon (New England, USA), and Darrell Critch (Atlantic Region & Quebec).
- For all **ANiC clergy** and families, especially those experiencing spiritual and physical attack.
- For **a major awakening**, a sovereign move of God in our churches and across our nations like has not been seen in our lifetimes. **Rise Up, O God** we pray. Intervene, O Lord, in the midst of our decaying culture and society! Raise up **an army of intercessors** who will call out to you for a mighty visitation of your power and presence! Send out **labourers into the harvest**, O Lord!
- Pray for God’s anointing on the Ven Ron & Deirdre Corcoran’s ministry, **Wounded Healers**, launched last month on the West Coast. May Christ’s healing power flow to the hurting.

- For the **Anglican Relief and Development Fund Canada** (ARDFC) whose new project is helping the ACNA church plants in Cuba purchase a van. This van will meet transportation needs and provide a means of revenue generation to reduce dependence on external financial support.
- For **those who serve us and are in authority over us** – our police forces, our armed forces, our emergency responders, our municipal elected officials, our provincial MLAs, MPPs and premiers, and our federal MPs and Prime Minister.
- For **God's wisdom for world leaders** with regard to conflicts in the Ukraine, Syria, and Iraq, and European nations struggling to absorb refugees. Pray for the hundreds of thousands of refugees who are seeking safety and asylum in Europe and here in North America. Pray for those churches and communities that are welcoming refugees that they may be a witness to God's compassionate care, both by what they say and do.
- Pray for **protection of innocent civilians** – adults and children – who so often are the victims in today's warfare. Pray especially for the many Middle Eastern, Asian and African Christians who are brutally persecuted for their refusal to renounce their faith in Jesus.