

## Prayer

Dear Lord, forgive me when I have failed to live up to the standards to which I aspire. In the face of temptations, give me the courage to choose to do what is right and turn away from the tempter: and in the face of spiritual danger, give me the strength to stand firm in faith and resolve to do what is good. Bless me, dear Lord, and receive my prayer: AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

*(Offering alternatives that can broaden your experience of prayer)*

### Prayer ideas

*Find a place where you can say your prayers out loud and not feel embarrassed. Speak to the Lord freely and tell Him your inner feelings*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who have little food.** *Pray for people whose farmlands and homes have been destroyed by governments and industries who have taken them by force. Pray that God's people will always stand up against such inhumanity*
- *Give thanks to God for the food you are able to grow and eat*
- *Pray for those who have the responsibility of governing the seas. Pray that the harvests of the oceans will not be compromised by competition and greed.*

## Meditation

Everlasting Light, shine on me in the midst of darkness;  
Everlasting Goodness, deliver me from all evil;  
Everlasting Strength, sustain me in my hours of need;  
Everlasting Rock, inspire me to stand firm in faith;  
Everlasting Wisdom, scatter the filth of my ignorance;  
Everlasting Power, be my support, through all I do;  
Everlasting Peace, still the fears that fill my mind;  
Everlasting Love, wrap me in the strength of Your arms;  
Everlasting Hope, keep me moving onwards, towards You;  
Everlasting Lord, we give You thanks and praise!

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## Bible passage - Hebrews 6:13-20

<sup>13</sup> When God made the promise to Abraham, since He had no-one greater to swear by, he swore on His own self, <sup>14</sup> saying, 'I will indeed bless you and multiply you.' <sup>15</sup> And so, having waited patiently, Abraham obtained the promise.

<sup>16</sup> People swear by someone greater than themselves, of course, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all dispute. <sup>17</sup> Therefore when God wanted to show the unchangeable nature of his purpose very clearly to those who were heirs to what He promised, he confirmed it by an oath, <sup>18</sup> and He did this so that through two fixed things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to Him for refuge might be strongly encouraged to take hold of the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup> We have this hope like a sure and steady anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain <sup>20</sup> where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf, having become a High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

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## Bible Study

### Review

In this, the last passage from Hebrews chapter 6, the writer continues from his discussion about faith, love and hope (6:9-12) to describe why it is that anyone can have confidence in God and His promises. He was making this case aware that people in the church may have been flagging in zeal, or were perhaps tempted to doubt the promises of God because of the continued delay in His return and the endless persecution endured by some in the early days of the Church.

Hebrews firstly takes the example of Abraham. When God first spoke to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), He promised him that he would make of him a great nation, bless him, and also make him into a blessing for the whole world. When Hebrews says that God swore this promise to Abraham 'on His own self' (6:13), it means that God's promise was an oath based on God's own ability to fulfil what He said; as we might say, God is not God unless He is capable doing whatever He says! The point here is that because Abraham persisted in faithfulness, he received the proof of this promise when his wife Sarah bore him a son, which itself meant his future children could become a 'great nation'. Because of this, Hebrews argues that if we persist in our hope, then God's promises will be fulfilled, and the early Christians hoped for Christ's coming again in glory!

Hebrews then explains the ancient principle of swearing an oath by which people swear on something greater than themselves (which is not the same as the idea of 'taking the Lord's name in vain' as mentioned in the Ten Commandments). At first sight, this is self explanatory (6:16). However, when the writer applies this to God, he says 'he confirmed it by an oath, and He did this so that through two fixed things in which it is impossible for God to lie ... we might be strongly encouraged' (6:17,18). What does this mean, and what are the 'two things' about which God cannot lie? It all seems rather obscure to a modern reader! What Hebrews is saying here is that our trust in God is sure and certain, for because God is God, neither His promise nor the oath which confirms it, can fail. We can therefore hold on to what God has said with complete confidence.

The author, however, was conscious of the people in the church to which he wrote who were troubled at the delay in Christ's coming again; something for which they may have waited for a long time. Because of this, the writer speaks powerfully about our sure hope in God (6:19f.). He describes it poetically as like a 'steady anchor of the soul'; a wonderful word picture which has influenced theologians and hymn writers alike over centuries. Lastly, as if he has recalled where he began this passage describing faith, love and hope, the writer of Hebrews links this idea of God's faithfulness straight back to Jesus as the great High Priest. He continues (6:19) by saying that our sure hope rests in the fact that Jesus has taken control of all access to God the Father, by 'entering the inner shrine behind the curtain'. Again, this is a poetic way of describing the rending of the Temple veil at the point of Jesus' death on the Cross, which exposed the inner sanctuary of the Temple (see Matthew 27:51 etc.). Jesus, our unique High Priest (and therefore like Melchizedek!) has gone ahead of us through death to secure our rights of access to the Father, and this should be all that we require for faith and hope for the future.

We have now come full circle in Hebrews, back to the discussion about Jesus as High Priest, which was broken off at Hebrews 5:11. As we continue with our studies of the letter to the Hebrews, we will now find out much more about what the writer regards as the 'solid food' of teaching about the nature of Jesus and His role as our High Priest.

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## Discipleship

### *Questions (for use in groups)*

1. Does the description of oaths in this study help you to understand more what is being said in this part of Hebrews?
2. Are the promises God made to Abraham still in operation for us today? Have they been fulfilled by Christ? Are they to be fulfilled by us?
3. When you say the words 'we have a sure and steady anchor of the soul', what springs to your mind?

## **Personal comments by author**

*This text is about certainty concerning matters of faith. It has become fashionable in recent years to talk about doubt as a necessary part of the spiritual life; some find this to be helpful, and others find it profoundly unhelpful. I have found within my own life, that there are indeed times when I am uncertain about serious matters of faith. However, because I am indeed on a spiritual journey towards certainty, doubt is something that I have to overcome. I therefore put effort into resolving doubt and securing my faith. It does nobody any good to wallow in uncertainty.*

## **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- **Something to think about:** Consider whether you believe there is a place for doubt within the Christian life, and if so, what does this passage of Scripture tell us? Is it possible to doubt Christ and be a 'Christian'?
- **Something to pray about:** Pray for any known to you who struggle with doubts, and pray that God will help them (through you if necessary and) address any problems which prolong their uncertainties.

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## **Final Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for Your goodness and Your love, which lighten my life and give it meaning and substance. Sustain me in this same goodness and love so that I may maintain a faithful witness to You throughout the whole of my life; I pray this through Jesus Christ my Lord; AMEN

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