

## Prayer

God, my Father and my delight, You are the source of peace and security in a world that refuses know You. In the riches of Your grace and kindness, touch each precious facet of my soul and make me a child of quietness and peace in this world of strife and war. God, my Father and my delight, stay close, I pray, stay close. AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

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

### Prayer ideas

*As you go about your work today, look carefully at the various pieces of technology you use. Pray against the evil uses of technology.*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who have little food.** *Pray for children who are maltreated by their own parents; it seems almost incredible that these things should happen until they come to light; let us pray for the afflicted while they still suffer*
- *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.*
- *Give thanks to God for the ability we have to communicate. Pray that such gifts will be used wisely and that technological developments will be properly governed*

## Meditation

If my people would listen to me, says the Lord,  
Then they would know how I answer their prayers.

If my people would turn to me says the Lord,  
Then they would find through my touch that I love them.

If my people would read my Word, says the Lord,  
Then they would not suffer through lack of knowledge.

If my people would love their neighbours, says the Lord,  
Then they would find their lives would be enriched.

If my people would do what I say, says the Lord,  
Then they would discover that I am faithful to my Word.

If my people would pursue the truth, says the Lord,  
Then they would find themselves with me, in my Kingdom.

Life is a challenge for everyone, says the Lord,  
And our souls find their peace when they rise to His call.

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## Bible passage - Hebrews 6:9-12

<sup>9</sup> Even though we speak like this, dear friends, in your case we are sure of better things concerning salvation. <sup>10</sup> For God is not unjust, and He will not overlook your work and the love you shown Him in serving the saints, as you still do. <sup>11</sup> And we eagerly want each of you to show the same zeal for the assurance of hope until the end; <sup>12</sup> so that you may not become lazy, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

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# Bible Study

## Review

With these words, the writer of Hebrews takes a step back from his previous harsh warning (6:1-8) about those who treat faith like a lifestyle choice. He assures his readers that he understands the integrity of their good work in Jesus' name (6:10) and is certain that they have a firmer grasp of the things of salvation (6:9) than those he previously criticised for abandoning the Christian faith (6:4-6). We do not know anything about the church to which he wrote; what the percentage of Jews and Gentiles were, for example, or of what town or city or region of the world. However, later passages of Hebrews speaks of a church community that had endured its fair share of suffering; 'recall those earlier days ... when you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being exposed to public abuse and persecution ...' (10:32,33). It may be that some people decided to 'jump ship' during times of persecution, and later on, after they had escaped persecution they expected to be allowed back into fellowship after others had suffered severely. We can imagine the tensions of such a situation. However, in our passage today, Hebrews recognises and commends those who had been faithful, as proved by their devotion in deeds of service.

When the letter says 'God will not overlook your work and your love ...' (6:10), this is not, however, a Gospel of works. Hebrews agrees with the rest of the New Testament that our salvation is won for us through Jesus Christ and Christ alone, and we access that salvation through faith. What Hebrews says here is also in line with Jesus' teaching and that of the other letters including that of James, when it tells us that the true evidence of people who have been saved lies in what they do and in particular, how they show that they love others. Abstract love is meaningless, as we all know, because love only exists when people do things to demonstrate it; and this is what the writer to the Hebrews means at this point in his letter (6:10). This simple sentence about love and service explains the basic principles of Christian service. In the Greek of the New Testament text (6:10), it is clear that the 'Him' in this sentence is Jesus Christ, meaning that deeds of service are pleasing to God when they are prompted by our love of Jesus. Now, Jesus Himself taught us to love others, and if we respond to this teaching by doing deeds of love for the benefit of others, then God is pleased, because this gives evidence to the world that God is a God of love. God is pleased by acts of devotion done not for personal gain or gratification, but out of a genuine response to the love shown to us by Jesus. This is reassuring; but Hebrews has more to say.

As I suggested above, it is strongly implied within Hebrews that some people from the church to which it was written abandoned faith (and also putting it into practice) after early difficulties, and the writer appears to be concerned about lethargy creeping into the life of the church. He sometimes refers to 'laziness' amongst God's people as being a real problem (5:11), and adds a word of warning about it in today's passage (6:12) that implies that people were not acting in a loving and caring manner towards each other. However, the second half of our passage today is not fundamentally about love, but the importance of confidence and hope in the future victory of our Lord over all sin and death. The letter says; 'we ... want each of you to show the same zeal for the assurance of hope until the end' (6:11). The sense of this passage is this; having explained the importance of showing faith through deeds of love, the Christian should persist with this as a lifestyle. What Hebrews says here is equivalent to Paul's words 'press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus' (Phil 3:14). The message is clear; hope in God is essential for the church to survive.

After the warning not to become lazy, the final verse of this passage is a magnificent appeal to God's people to persist and become 'imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised' (6:12). This great verse focuses our attention on the way in which others before us have persisted through difficult times to gain the promises of God. They are an example to us of how we should behave. If we recall the story of Jacob in Genesis (from Gen 25 onwards), we will remember that he was led by God through countless extraordinary experiences, good and bad, before he reached the end of his journeys and died in peace (Gen 49,50). The people of Israel had many such great examples of faith within their history, and we may have in mind some of the great missionaries, spiritual giants or saints of more recent times. All of these are people who have persisted in faith through their own profoundly difficult times and have come through triumphant despite the (sometimes) tragedy of their circumstances.

Love and hope are the clues to this great passage of Scripture, and they are always essential ingredient to Christian discipleship. However, if we are to persist in all faith, we may need to let the Lord lead us to be encouraged by the example of others, perhaps even those around us, and certainly by the stories of those in scripture. These inspire us to persist in faith and love, and in showing our faith and love through what we do.

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## Discipleship

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

1. To what extent is 'doing good deeds' used as an excuse for faith, and as an expression of faith within the church today?
2. Do you find it hard to sustain faith when times have been hard? Why is this so what can you do about it?
3. How are we helped by the example of people of faith in the past?

### **Personal comments by author**

*Over the years, I have been inspired by a number of people, both from within the Bible and people from the history of the church. It is important that Christians pass on the great stories of faith from one generation to another, and remember those whose spiritual journey has brought us to where we are today. In the College where I trained for ministry, there were huge boards in the entrance lobby with the lists of names of people who went as missionaries to Africa in days before modern medicines. Most lasted a month or two, some no more than a few weeks; yet as news came back to the College of those who had died, others stepped forward to take their place, year upon year. is Such testimonies will not be lost in God's heart or in heaven; but will we forget them here on earth? Surely, they are our inspirational and spiritual heritage.*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- **Something to do:** Take the last of the questions above, and reflect upon those who have inspired you in the past, and what they have done to influence you? Write down a list of these people and keep it as a reminder of your spiritual journey
- **Something to do:** Write down a list of the people of the Bible whose stories have inspired you; what is it about them that has influenced you?

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## Final Prayer

O Lord my God, remove from me everything that blocks the presence of the Holy Spirit and give me the faith and love I need to speed my soul towards Your will. Rescue me from my sins, so that I may offer a purer gift of service within the whole of my life; through Jesus Christ my Lord, I pray; AMEN

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