

Prayer

Dear Lord and Father, Your love has no end. You continue to show us love even when we have completely lost our way, and You draw us back to Yourself with the firmness and care of the truest of friends. May we always know that whatever we feel, whatever we do, and whatever we say, Your love is never exhausted, because You are God Almighty: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Light

We use the word 'light' to mean many things, but nearly all of them are positive. Jesus is described as the 'light of the world', so pray that this may indeed be true, today.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for the country of Sri Lanka, for stability and reconciliation*
- *Pray for political leaders who are imprisoned in their own lands*
- *Give thanks for the many different friends you have*

Meditation

We believe in God, who is Love,

Whose Word sustains the universe and all life within it.

We believe in Jesus, God's Son,

Whose life shows the meaning of love and brings peace.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,

Who is God, alive and active like wind and fire within us.

We believe in the Church of God,

Which is all God's people, the 'body' of Christ our Lord.

We believe in the resurrection,

Which is new life with Jesus, both now and in the future.

We believe in the return of Jesus,

Which is the end of our world, when God remakes it anew!

We believe in a God of Love.

Bible Study - Hebrews 10:32-39

³² Now, remember the earlier days when you became enlightened and you stood firm during difficult struggles with suffering; ³³ you were even exposed to public abuse and persecution, together with others who were treated the same way. ³⁴ You shared with those who were in prison and accepted the seizure of your belongings with good grace, knowing that you had obtained for yourselves better and more lasting possessions. ³⁵ So do not abandon your confidence, for it has a great reward; ³⁶ and you will need perseverance to do the will of God and receive what is promised. ³⁷ For in just a short time, 'He who is to come will indeed come and not delay, ³⁸ and he who is my 'righteous' will live by faith. I will not be pleased with anyone who stands back.' ³⁹ But we are not

the kind of people who turn back and are destroyed, but are those who have faith and are therefore saved.

Review

Here are words of encouragement for all God's people. They offer spiritual support to people who have had a difficult time since confessing faith (10:32-34), including people who had been placed in prison because of their faith. The particular details of such trials, of course, change from age to age; but it is generally true that people who become Christian often have trouble. This may well be opposition from people they know who do not want them to change, or from the spiritual opposition of the enemy, whose desire is to prevent the young Christian from growing in Christ.

In yesterday's passage we read a sharp message of warning to those who treat the issue lightly, thereby spurning the Son of God (10:29). You may have been surprised at the severity of the warning, issued largely against people who had begun to compromise their faith because of the complexities of trying to live as a Christian in the institutionally pagan Roman Empire. However, people have always had to face difficult social issues and becoming a Christian has never been easy, so every age has had to deal in a different way with the problem of why people have trouble in the early days of faith. In this passage, the writer of Hebrews begins to deal with this by encouraging such people, if possible, to stand firm in Christ and persevere. It may sound like cold comfort, but sometimes such things must be said.

The way that the writer encourages his readers to stand firm is to suggest that they recall their first experiences of faith (10:32), and remember that they have survived trials in the past. Such action should surely help Christians face what is before them in the strength of the Lord, knowing that they have obtained 'lasting possessions' (10:34). It is not easy for us to imagine what it must have been like to endure the suffering of early Christians. Early Roman documents describe them enduring all manner of inhuman treatments, being burned, imprisoned, publicly 'shamed' in stocks or even 'thrown to the lions' for sport. We should not forget that some Christians experience similar things today, particularly in countries where there is complete intolerance of those who do not share the beliefs of the majority, as happens in some Muslim countries. Equally, we should not forget that many Christians experience prolonged spiritual attack designed by Satan to undermine true faith at every level, perhaps through the temptations of wealth, power, sex or an easy life. Such trials are not easily seen, but they still rob God's church of thousands.

Hebrews adds that for each Christian who stands firm amidst such trials, there is 'a great reward' (10:35). This is because perseverance in faith in the midst of a troubled world is the calling of all who love Jesus and await His coming. This is what Hebrews means by the quote made from Habakkuk 2:3f. found in verses 37 and 38. The original text in the Old Testament reads 'for there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay ... but the righteous will live by their faith'. Within this prophecy, the writer of Hebrews has seen the hope of the Messiah, and he has replaced the 'it' with 'He', meaning the Messiah, who 'will indeed come and not delay' (10:37). This, of course is not an abstract hope, but one that rewards those who 'live by faith' (10:38).

We all need encouragement, and this passage does this by leading us back to the source of our life, our faith and our hope; 'we are not the kind of people who turn back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and are therefore saved' (10:39). Ultimately, we need nothing more to persevere in our faith than what God has already given us through the gift of His Son Jesus Christ. This is what we affirm, our strength and our hope.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What are the most common struggles that people have today with their faith? How can they be overcome?
2. In what ways can we show confidence in our faith? Is it necessary to do anything to show this confidence?
3. Does the prospect of Christ's coming fill you with hope or with dread? Why is this so?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Each of us has experienced times when we have not felt sure of some aspect of our faith. At such times, we will be blessed if we take stock of what is happening. If we do not do this, there is a danger that we will just struggle on and come to accept a spiritual 'problem' as something normal rather than something to be dealt with. It is always best to deal with spiritual problems by sharing them with others, because this is how the ministry by which we help each other begins, and how we encourage each other in faith. Make sure that you know what you should do when trouble strikes!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Who do you go to, in order to deal with you own problems and trials? Reflect on this, because if you are unwilling to receive ministry from others, then this may mean that you are more susceptible to trouble than you think. I am aware that to say this is a challenge, but I have faced this, and therefore recommend it to all.*
- *Pray for any new Christians you know, and be aware that they may be experiencing troubles even though they may not say so. All you have to do is ask, however, and you may have the opportunity to help!*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, please help all who find it hard to deal with their problems, and do not know where to turn. May we be sensitive to the plight of others, and ready to be used by You to help. May we also be willing to receive help from others when we have needs, so that we are seen to 'practice what we preach'. Thank You Lord Jesus, AMEN.