

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

Be close to me, Lord God, for I long to live my life according to Your standards of gracious and generous love. Give me a forgiving heart towards others, a desire to do all I can to meet their needs, the courage always to discern what is right and true, and the strength to persevere through trouble so that peaceful solutions to human conflict may be found. You alone can help me live such a life; thank You, Lord God, AMEN

### Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: ACTION

**1. For yourself**

*Pray in penitence; pray asking the Lord's forgiveness for the things that you have not done. Pray also about those things you have done that have proved to be wrong or unhelpful. Let the Lord search your heart*

**2. For your friends and family**

*Place before the Lord your feelings about some within the family who have not done for you what you believe they have promised. If necessary, forgive those who you feel have hurt you*

**3. For the church and its work**

*Pray that the church of God might be a forgiving community, and one that is always open to the true healing of forgiveness in all its forms*

**4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)**

*Pray for reconciliation within your country and your local community. Pray that people who have long been enemies may by the grace of God become friends. Pray that God's people will be willing to do the work necessary for such things to happen*

### Meditation

Did you know that Jesus was born for you?

You have heard that Jesus died for you;  
That He gave His life to forgive your sins;  
That in dying He conquered sin and evil,  
And made a way for you to go to heaven.

You have heard that Jesus rose for you;  
He has conquered death to defeat all evil,  
And live a life that demonstrates true love;  
A true message of Good News for you.

You have heard that Jesus gave you His Spirit;  
That He has poured His gracious gifts on you,  
To enable you to live the life He has given;  
And come at the end to your eternal home.

He was born for you; Jesus has come for you.  
He became a human being just like you,  
He felt pain and love and laughter, just like you;  
So your faith is real, and God, your God, is true.

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## Bible Study

### Bible passage – John 1:15-18

<sup>15</sup> John testified about Him and preached; 'This was He of whom I said, "He who comes after me is more important than me because He was before me.'"

<sup>16</sup> From His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God. It is His only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

### Review

The coming of Jesus into the world as a baby was a unique event in the life of the world, for at that moment, God Himself became a human being, and entered our world as a child with all the limitations and dangers that this entailed. John wrote this passage many years later, and sought to explain as concisely as possible what this incredible mystery meant. His basic teaching is that Jesus is the 'Word', God's divine and active presence within the world (1:14). In this passage today, John explains what he means by this, beginning with a summary of the preaching of John the Baptist (1:15). He then describes the generosity of God (1:16), the difference between Moses and Jesus (1:17), and why it is necessary for Jesus to come as the divine 'Word', so that we can 'see' God (1:18). We can look at each verse separately, but together, they add up to John's own personal testimony of Jesus.

To begin with, the testimony of John the Baptist is exactly what we might expect of the prophet who comes before the Messiah. John clearly had a big following in his day, as we can see from the fact that his 'disciples' came to see Jesus on various occasions (see Matt 11:1f., Luke 7:20, John 3:23f.). John was a charismatic figure who preached repentance and strongly opposed the established religious practices of the day, so it is not surprising that he had many followers in his own right. There is also some evidence of groups of his followers continuing some time after his death in the first century; and on several occasions the Acts of the Apostles mentions those who preached 'the baptism John preached' (Acts 10:37, 11:16, 18:25f. and the Christians at Ephesus – Acts 19). It was therefore very important for John (the Gospel writer) to emphasise that this great preacher said himself that he was not as important as Jesus, God's Messiah; he said, 'He who comes after me is more important than me because He was before me' (1:15), and in so doing, honoured Jesus. When a great man honours another, we know that we should listen to his testimony.

John's personal testimony is this, '*from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace*' (1:16). This is John's expression of gratitude to the Jesus he knew and loved. Over the time they shared together, Jesus had taught him so much and they had shared some precious moments together, which were undoubtedly a highlight of John's life. However, John knew that Jesus' love was not exclusive, He shared Himself completely with all those around him. John knew that what he had received from Jesus was truth, love, compassion and eventually the forgiveness of his sins (20:19-32) and the gift of eternal life. This was truly 'grace upon grace'.

Secondly, John wanted to make clear a vital part of Christian testimony, particularly to Jews and to those who did not know the difference between Jews and Christians. His testimony was that even though the Jews believed Moses passed on the most important revelation of God within the Law, the truth was that this law was only a shadow of what God intended to give His people through the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus. Judaism was stuck in legalism, but Jesus replaced this with a relationship with God based upon redemption and grace. The testimony of God's people is the same today, and if the Christian church gives a different impression, then it has departed from the truth as well as its heritage.

Finally, John describes in one brief sentence the mystery of Jesus' relationship with God (1:18). God is Almighty, all-powerful and unseen by human eyes, but if we want to know what God is like, we must look at Jesus, God's Son. We know this today, so it sounds easy to say. However, this statement was utterly revolutionary in the first century AD, and it is impossible for us to fully grasp the significance of these words here at the beginning of John's Gospel. John's testimony is that through Jesus we may both know about God and perceive something of what He is like, and also come near to God because of Jesus' grace and love. There is no more powerful testimony.

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# Discipleship

## Questions for groups

1. What have you received from the Lord that you could describe as 'grace upon grace'? Do you testify to what God has done for you?
2. How important for Christian faith is Moses and his work, and how does this differ from its importance for Jews?
3. What has Jesus taught you about the nature of God? Does this affect you in any way?

## Discipleship challenges

- *Somewhere in this passage there is a challenge for each of us, for we all need to grow in our testimony of God's work in our lives. If our testimony is the same today as it was several years ago, we should ask what has been going on! How has your own testimony of God's grace grown over recent years?*
- *How does testimony take place within your church, and what steps can be taken to establish a place where people hear what others have to say about their faith in Jesus, and their relationship with God.*

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## Final Prayer

Merciful Lord, I long to be a better person for You, living a life that shows more faith, and trusting in Your death and resurrection. Help me exercise my faith in every circumstance of my life, in my work, in my home and in the privacy of my mind. And may I know Your peace all my days: AMEN

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