

Prayers

Opening prayer

What a glorious day it is, Lord God! And what a wonderful opportunity there is in this day to press on with all that You have given me to do. Almighty Lord and God, You have guided my life through years of ups and downs, and here on this day and at this time, I seek to honour You in every part of my life and work. I praise You, Lord God, for You are my help and my strength, and You are my Salvation! Alleluia!

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: WEALTH

1. For yourself

Get hold of your bank statements, savings balances, life assurance policies, loan payments, credit card balances and all other financial records and place them before the Lord in prayer.

2. For your friends and family

Pray for any of your family or friends who are dependent upon your financial support, and pray for any you know who support others. Pray for the grace by which all God's people help each other

3. For the church and its work

Get hold of the church's balance sheets and pray about them, and make a special note of any monies given to charitable organisations

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

Pray for your country's national bank and the government's treasury. Use the internet to find out a little about how these work and pray for their integrity

Meditation

Take in the breath of the Holy Spirit
And breathe more deeply of the things of God

Accept the peace and love of Christ
Which sweeps away all trouble and fear

Rejoice in the challenge of the Spirit's power
To achieve the impossible for God's Kingdom

Receive the unconditional gifts of God
The guarantee of faith and means of ministry

Be comforted by real presence of Christ
And feel the spiritual sustenance of His breath

Wonder at the mystery of His wind and fire
Which purifies, guides, protects and enlightens

Take in the breath of God's Holy Spirit
And be changed forever in body, spirit and soul

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Samuel 16: 14-23

¹⁴ Now the Spirit of the LORD had left Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.

¹⁵ Saul's attendants said to him,

'Look, an evil spirit from God is troubling you; ¹⁶ let our lord give the order, and his servants here will search for someone who can play the harp. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes on you, and you will feel better.'

¹⁷ So Saul said to his attendants,

'Find someone who plays well and bring him to me.'

¹⁸ One of the servants answered,

'I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the harp. He is a brave man and a warrior, who speaks wisely and looks well; moreover, the LORD is with him.'

¹⁹ Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said,

'Send me your son David, who is with the sheep.'

²⁰ So Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them with his son David to Saul; ²¹ and David came to Saul and entered his service.

Saul liked David very much, and he became one of his armour-bearers. ²² So Saul sent word to Jesse, saying,

'Allow David to remain in my service, for I am pleased with him.'

²³ Then, whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play, and relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

Review

The young David is brought into the service of King Saul, ostensibly as a musician whose ability will relieve the king when he is troubled. David is more than a musician, however, and Saul employs him as an armour-bearer!

After the powerful story of David's anointing by Samuel (16:1-13), we are left in some suspense. The young David has indeed been anointed king of Israel, but there is another occupant of the throne, King Saul. God's anointing, therefore, must be held in abeyance until David can claim what God has promised, and in the meantime, he must press ahead knowing his destiny but without the privileges of his high calling. If this was a story of mere fiction, we would say that the author has skilfully created unresolved tension to make his story exciting. But this is real history, and the story is more than entertainment. David had to bear this tension personally and to keep his secret as a precious gift of God; he had to live his life in a godly way, not knowing how, where, or when God's promise would be fulfilled.

The focus of the narrative now turns to the court of King Saul. Instinctively, we know that this court will belong one day to David, so the story of his first steps in Israel's corridors of power is fascinating. Things were not going all that well for King Saul. Yes, he had won a battle against the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15), but this was no end to Israel's problems or the threat of war. On the borders of Judah, not far from Jerusalem, lay the tribal lands of the Philistines, a warrior people who were always on the look-out to extend their borders and encroach on Israel's God-given territory. Many things were on Saul's mind, and he had lost both the wise counsel of the prophet Samuel and the blessing of the Lord, the God of Israel (1 Samuel 15:22-34).

The book of 1 Samuel now presents us with an intriguing scenario. Saul is troubled, and it seems that nothing can console him or give him peace (16:14-16) except the prospect of good music. All this seems relatively clear-cut and easy to understand, but the story here in 1 Samuel is far from straightforward. What does Scripture mean by saying that Saul was visited by an 'evil spirit from the Lord'? From the perspective of New Testament Christianity, the idea of an 'evil spirit' under the Lord's authority seems rather odd!

Nevertheless, this is what Scripture says here, and we need to account for it and not merely dismiss the phrase by saying that it is somehow irrelevant and pre-Christian. Such an attitude lies behind too much rejection of God's Word in the Old Testament Scriptures. If we are uncertain about the idea that God somehow uses evil to achieve His will, then we must remember that God did precisely this when Jesus died on the Cross. The same God who allowed His Son to die at the hands of evil men on the Cross at Calvary, used an evil spirit, many centuries earlier, to cajole a troubled king of Israel to employ a gifted young man at court. But of course, this was not just any young man, it was David, the man God anointed to bring unity and peace to His people, and who would one day sit on the throne first occupied by King Saul.

As we find in many passages of Scripture, an unnamed person steps forward at the right time to point out the merits of the man God will use to achieve His purposes (16:18). A servant knew of Jesse's family, and although David was clearly the least within the family, the story was that the youngest son of Jesse was no ordinary man. He was brave, spoke well, and was good-looking, something like the Old Testament equivalent to a Hollywood super-hero! But Saul's servant had no reason to overstate David's praises, and God used the truthful report of this honest and anonymous man. Now if he had lied about David, King Saul might well have exacted a terrible retribution, so there is every reason for us to believe this glowing description of David (16:18), designed as it was to ensure his employment in the king's service.

Jesse had been honoured to receive the request from court, and he sent his son to the king with a suitable gift (16:20). But he was probably not ready for all that would happen as a consequence of David's royal service. King Saul took an instant liking to the young man David, and gave him a position in court, that of an 'armour-bearer'. This placed David more formally on the first rung of the court ladder, and his position was fully endorsed when King Saul sent and asked formal permission for David to remain with him at court (16:22).

This is a well crafted story, but as we find so often even today, real life stories have twists and turns that are unlikely to be fiction, and so it will prove with the story of David. We have been told that King Saul was very fond of David, but the young man was employed first of all to perform a dangerous task. When the king became troubled, or, as 1 Samuel puts it, *'whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul'* (16:23), it was David's responsibility to play music on his harp to bring release to Saul's spirit. Remarkably, he was effective in the task, but we get the feeling that this is a story boiling up to something much more, and tomorrow we will begin to discover more of what this is.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. You do you think that Scripture means by speaking of an evil spirit that comes from God? How is it that God can use evil?
2. Why do you think that God has chosen David to be the King who comes after Saul? Do these outward qualities matter? Does this passage of Scripture give any hint of David's inner or spiritual qualities? If not, why not?
3. David had to start his life in court at the foot of the ladder. What is the value of starting 'at the bottom' and working up, and can you give other examples within Scripture of people have done something similar?

Discipleship challenges

- *It is challenging to think that God can use even the evil that happens to us. Think back over your life to see whether this has happened, or whether this is happening, to you. Ask the Lord in prayer to take control of every aspect of your life to His glory, and ask Him to use even the evil that happens to you for good.*
- *God clearly worked in David's life from his teenage years. Are you aware of God working in your life since teenage years? If so, write down some of the main events in your journey with the Lord over the years. This is your story of faith, and it is no less important to God that of David.*

Final Prayer

Father of all, You have chosen people since the beginning of time, to do Your will and be Your witnesses in this world. Thank You for choosing me, and thank You that I stand together with David and all the other great heroes of Christian faith as witnesses to Your love and power. We praise You Almighty Lord and father of all: AMEN
