

Prayer

God, my Father and my delight, You are the unsearchable source of peace and security in a world which knows You not. Save me by the riches of Your grace and the touch of Your kindness, and make me a child of quietness and peace in a world of strife and war. God, my Father, stay close, I pray, stay close. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: the sick in mind

Illness of the mind is something we do not like to think about; but mental illness afflicts large numbers of people at some point in their lives. Pray for any you know whose minds are ill.

On-going prayers

- Pray for the armed forces of your country and the work they do
- Pray for those who suffer due to the world economic crisis
- Pray for the nation of China

Meditation

Glory be to You, O Lord, for the wonders of life;
You have made all things for Your pleasure and for ours

For the joy of meeting friends and sharing stories
For the happiness we see on the face of one we love
For the enjoyment of having fun with children of all ages
For the pleasure of cooking and having a meal with friends
For the thrill of mountains, lakes, countryside and scenery
For the delights of music, drama, and all the visual arts
For the bliss of quiet moments spent in relaxation

Glory be to You, O Lord, for the wonders of life;
You will redeem all things in Your New Re-creation!

Bible Study - 1 Samuel 20:1-5

¹ David fled from Naioth in Ramah. He came before Jonathan and said, 'What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin against your father that he is trying to take my life?' ² He said to him, 'Far from it! You shall not die. My father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me; and why should my father hide this from me? Never!' ³ But David also swore, 'Your father knows well that you like me; and he thinks, "Do not let Jonathan know this, or he will be grieved." But truly, as the LORD lives and as you yourself live, there is but a step between me and death.' ⁴ Then Jonathan said to David, 'Whatever you say, I will do for you.' ⁵ David said to Jonathan, 'Tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at the meal; but let me go, so that I may hide in the field until the third evening.'

Review

After the very strange episode in the story of David which we read yesterday (1 Sam 19:18-24), this reading is much more straightforward and describes a conversation between David and Jonathan. It is an anguished conversation between two friends, grieved at how things have turned out, and yearning for trouble to be overcome and peace to be restored. David had fled from Saul, and the King had been humiliated in his first attempt to get David killed (19:18-24), so a new situation was developing in which both David and Jonathan both felt that endangered by the wrath of the old King. The next day (20:5) was Israel's annual religious festival and a major social event. It would have been unacceptable for David not to be present in court, but David knew he was not safe in the King's presence. David refused to continue a pointless game of cat and mouse with Saul, pretending that things were all right between them, yet knowing that Saul was watching to take advantage of him, in order to kill him at a moment's notice.

Jonathan, Saul's son and David's close friend, had to face this reality too, but was clearly having difficulty. He believed that if any plot were to be afoot, he would know about it (20:2), but David saw through his friend's own weakness, knowing Jonathan's loyalty to both himself and his father the King. David was putting together a plan which would enable him to finally escape from Saul's court without any bloodshed and with sufficient time to make get clean away from Saul's men. Jonathan, as Saul's son, would be his ally in this final 'get away' from the old, embittered King.

As we follow David through this story, it is clear that whatever the rights and wrongs of the whole situation, He was doing all in his power to act in a godly way. He knew that Saul was trying to kill him, but he refused to rise to the bait and respond with anger and aggression. He was genuinely attempting to handle a difficult situation with grace. Most of us have experienced the anguish of a situation such as this, as relationships that we once thought good and wholesome have deteriorated, or when a major breakdown occurs. We know the anguish and pain of rejection by those we have previously looked up to, as David himself once looked up to the great King Saul. Rejection is a terrible thing, but it is something that most of us experience. David's testimony, however, is that whilst he acted in self interest, it was not necessary for him to become bitter against his opponent. His closeness to God enabled him to rise above the entrapments of evil, and remain focussed on what God required him to do rather than any anger that could consume him if he allowed it. After all, he was the Lord's anointed, but he would have to wait now for the old King to die and stay in the wings as an exile until that time came. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but swallow it he did, knowing that his Lord was able to sustain him.

We can learn from David that God is able to lead us through the toughest of times; and it is a message that we find in the New Testament as well as the Old. For example, Paul says 'who will separate us from the love of God; will hardship or distress ... ?' (Rom 8:35), but whilst it is wonderful to read such words in the works inspired writers such as Paul, the Old Testament illustrates the same principles within the long saga of the story of David. It is one of God's great gifts to know His power in the midst of troubled times, and if like David, we learn to live our lives in constant reference to our Lord, seeking His will in all matters. David constantly spoke of the Lord within conversation (see 20:3) and when in battle, he fought 'for the Lord' (see 1 Samuel 17). People did not remark 'the Lord is with him' for nothing (1 Samuel; 18:14), it was because this was the way David lived his life.

The presence of the Lord is one of the greatest treasures we can possess, but it cannot be bought and neither can we bargain for it in any way. It is God's gift to those who 'seek' and 'ask' and 'knock' (Matt 7:7) with purpose and with regularity. Then, as we live in the light of this great gift, we discover that He is powerful to help us in the most difficult of times; and just like David, He will be with us when our own strength fails.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Was David's faithfulness to his friend Jonathan a weakness or a strength? Would it have been better if he had simply left the scene without this intrigue?
2. Is the presence of the Lord something that is constant, or does it come and go?
3. Share the difficult times you have had within which the Lord has helped you with the strength to keep calm and prevail (or similar)?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

An agonising conversation with a friend about a critical situation can be very taxing. Sometimes differences come out which were not obvious before and this can be painful. I have been in danger for my life before, and know what it is like to have one's judgement clouded by appalling circumstances. You cannot prepare for this; you have to trust in the Lord completely.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *If you know of someone who faces very difficult circumstances, then consider prayerfully what you should do to be of assistance; you could either be very helpful or completely unhelpful. Ask the Lord to show you what to do.*
- *Pray for any family members of yours who are in need of help because their relationships have broken down. Seek ways to be a positive influence for good and not an aggravating factor.*

Final Prayer

You, O Lord, have done wonderful things for me and for those I love. Help me within the difficult times when I need you most, and be the master of my emotions and my thoughts, so that I can act in a manner that is worthy of You. All praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ: AMEN