

Prayer

Father, from the greatness of Your majestic creation to the wonder of Your love for every person You have made, Your works are glorious and are perfect in execution and intent. Forgive us for our part in the evils of this world that prevent others from seeing the marvels of Your work, and make us beacons for your light and love in this troubled world. This we pray in the name of Your Son, Jesus. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Thanks for Life

Give thanks to God for everything happening in your life which is wholesome, positive and a blessing; to you, to others and to the Lord. Ask the Lord to help You remain positive.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those in hospital*
- *Pray to bless those people who you find difficult*
- *Pray for those who have been caught up in the use of drugs*

Meditation

What a great day it is when the Spirit of God
Moves in the heart of a man or a woman,
Changing everything.

For when the Spirit comes, colours look different,
The Bible is alive with meaning, purpose and love,
The face of one so moved is radiant, full of joy,
Prayer becomes as natural as breathing in the open air,
Everyone appears full of potential, waiting to be tapped,
And the world is full of endless opportunity, through Christ.

If you do not know this; be ready for God's blessing!
If you have known it but cannot recall; go back, start again!
If you want to know it, just let yourself go and ask the Saviour!
And if this is what you know, pray for those who have yet to find it!

Bible Study - 1 Sam 24:16-22

¹⁶ When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, 'Is this your voice, my son David?' Saul lifted up his voice and wept. ¹⁷ He said to David, 'You are more righteous than I; for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. ¹⁸ Today you have explained how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the LORD put me into your hands. ¹⁹ For who has ever found an enemy, and sent the enemy safely away? So may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. ²⁰ Now I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. ²¹ Swear to me therefore by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not wipe out my name from my father's house.'

²² So David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home; but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Review

For a few moments whilst he spoke to Saul after following him out of the cave, David must have been on edge, not knowing how the King would respond to the peculiar and somewhat humiliating experience that was now revealed to him (24:8-15). David had rejected the suggestion of his men to kill the King (24:7) whilst he was at his mercy, and put his own life at risk by attempting to confront Saul. David's desire was to turn the King's heart and win his favour again, and so bring an end to the animosity between the two of them that had brought such pain. In this way, David's strange life of internal exile could be ended and he would be able to return to the royal court, his friendship with Jonathan and his own family.

It always takes courage to face situations head on in order to try and bring about change. David's attempt to do this was a product of faith, and though it is not said in the story, his actions were those of one who knew that God alone could change the hearts of men such as Saul. David was wise enough to know that Saul was a man who had lost his ability to control himself, and he had seen him close by at court showing evil and possibly manic behaviour to both himself and others (18:17-19; 19:8-10; 20:30-34). Saul was not going to permanently change his heart towards David without a miracle being performed, and David was prepared to open up the possibility for this by making an appeal to Saul.

When David had finished speaking, Saul wept (24:16). He was not able to respond to this sudden and very peculiar turn of events in any other way. What we need to remember in this story is that what was happening was most likely to be in front of others. Behind David were his men, and on the outside of the cave were Saul's men, who were probably a royal bodyguard responsible for the King's security. All were waiting for Saul's reaction. There is something sad about Saul's weeping. He had publicly thrown David out of his court through envy and spite and had pursued him relentlessly, even murdering people who were in the way of his pursuit (e.g. the priests at Nob - 22:14-19). Now he wept before his enemy!

Saul responded to David's speech (24:8-15), confessing his own unrighteousness (24:17), accepting David's plea of innocence (24:18), acknowledging David's honour in not killing him in the cave (24:19) and blessing David (24:19). Strangely, Saul went on to confess something that we can only presume everyone knew; that David had indeed been anointed by Samuel as heir to Saul (24:20). He finished his speech by asking David for mercy on his family at such a time as David would take the throne. It was then common practice to 'eliminate' the opposition when coming to power, as it is to this day in dictatorships and military regimes throughout the world. In this case, David's opposition would be Saul's family, which would have within it sons of the King by his different wives, who each regarded themselves as having a claim to the throne. Certainly, this becomes a thorny issue when David does ascend to the throne, and David has to choose carefully how to honour the public appeal made to him by Saul in this incident.

It is hard to imagine what everyone present must have made of this extraordinary speech by Saul. Scripture simply records that David went his way and returned to his 'stronghold', and Saul returned 'home'. It seems an anticlimax to the whole story, but it gives one thing away. I doubt if David really thought that any great change had happened in the heart of the King. If he had trusted that the Lord had changed Saul through this incident, he might have returned to court with Saul; staying with him to make things better and to see his own wife and family again. It is clear however, that by returning home, David did not trust Saul's words. He could see that the speech was not the response of a man who God had

changed; it was the response of a man who was not in full control of himself and was not able to handle the humiliation of the experience in any other way.

David did not pursue the matter. He went back to his stronghold, biding his time to see what would happen, and continuing to bear the shame of his exile. Yet even in this, scripture hints to us about God's favour on David. The word 'stronghold' normally refers to where God, or the King, dwells; and a 'home' was where anyone lived. We might have expected it the other way round, but David returned to his 'stronghold', and Saul returned to his 'home'.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Have you been in a contentious situation, where your opponent has suddenly given in to you? What does this feel like? Is it easy or difficult to handle?
2. Does being 'right' always bring justice, either now or in God's good time?
3. Is it possible to know whether someone else is acting honestly? Share your thoughts about experiences about this.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I am conscious as I write this that I am thinking of people with whom I have had a difficult relationship over the years. Some of those have been repaired and some have not changed. All of us have to endure such problems but the important thing is that we maintain our focus on the Lord and commit such issues into His hands. Only He can sort them out.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Do you find it easy to be gracious to others who you feel wronged by? Take time to pray and fast about this issue and ask the Lord to have His hand on the timing of anything that you might do to resolve an issue*
- *Look back on your own life and think of people who you have known perhaps people in positions of power, but those who have been quite damaged people because of the burdens they have had to bear. Pray for them.*

Final Prayer

I praise You, Lord God, for have provided for all my needs. Help me take hold of this truth when I feel vulnerable, unloved, challenged or rejected; and as I do this, strengthen my faith and draw me closer to Your path of holiness. With this security, open up my heart to enjoy this great life You have given me. Alleluia!