

Prayer

The beauty of Your world astounds me, Lord God, and the cruelty of humanity shocks me. Show me to how live according to Your Word, so that I may be a means whereby truth is upheld, honesty is valued, love is seen as strength, and care for others made the highest goal. As I pray, show me the truth about this world, Your Love, and my life; and in this light, may I make a difference, for the sake of others, and for You. AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Community Spirit

Pray for those people who live alone and feel unable to join in anything going on around them, and are cut off from their local community. Pray for barriers to be broken down.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for aid workers throughout the world who need our support*
- *Pray for those traumatised by the effects of war and violence*
- *Give thanks for the joys of good sport*

Meditation

How will you speak to me next time, Lord Jesus?
You have spoken to me in the past, from time to time;
But what about next time? How will you reveal Yourself?
Are my expectations simply stuck in an unholy rut?

Clear out my heart, my mind, my spirit, my ears;
Open up my soul to hear You speaking in new ways;
Spoken or read, seen or felt, approached or heard,
Or coming unexpectedly and surprising me delightfully.

May I never limit the boundless creativity of Your Word!
Liberate me into Your world, Your greater revelation;
Full of love, prophecy, sustenance, care and guidance,
Just waiting to be seen and heard and fully grasped ...

Bible Study - 1 Samuel 29:1-7

¹ Now the Philistines gathered all their forces at Aphek, while the Israelites were encamped by the fountain that is in Jezreel. ² As the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish, ³ the commanders of the Philistines said, 'What are these Hebrews doing here?' Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, 'Is this not David, the servant of King Saul of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years? Since he deserted to me I have found no fault in him to this day.'

⁴ But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him; and the commanders of the Philistines said to him, 'Send the man back, so that he may return to the place that you have assigned to him; he shall not go down with us to battle, or else he may become an adversary to us in the battle. For how

could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here? ⁵ Is this not David, of whom they sing to one another in dances, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands"?"

⁶ Then Achish called David and said to him, 'As the LORD lives, you have been honest, and to me it seems right that you should march out and in with me in the campaign; for I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me until today. Nevertheless the lords do not approve of you. ⁷ So go back now; and go peaceably; do nothing to displease the lords of the Philistines.'

Review

How many times have you found yourself in a compromising situation from which you cannot extract yourself? The only way forward is to wait and see how things work out, and to pray as hard as you can that the Lord will bring you through and exercise control of the situation. The whole experience is a trial of faith, and because many of us experience this, I dare to suggest that what is described in this passage is an experience like this from the life of David; and we should not jump at too many conclusions because of it! As I previously explained, the end of the book of 1 Samuel is drawing to a close, and we are only a hairsbreadth away from expecting the death of Saul in battle with the Philistines (ch 31). David needs to be as far away as possible from this action so that no blame can be attached to him personally for the death of Israel's first King.

David had in fact done well to leave Judah and live temporarily in Philistia, because by doing this, he prevented Saul from spending his energies touring Judah and Israel in search of him, and thereby diluting his ability to defend the nation. David had returned to the Philistine region of Gath, to King Achish (27:1ff), and when David had established a working relationship with him, Achish made it clear that David would have to go to war with the Philistines. David gave a positive but somewhat ambiguous reply to his request; 'you shall know what your servant can do' (28:2). Now, however, with the whole Philistine Army assembled to make a final assault on the weakened King Saul, the other Philistine Kings were highly suspicious of David. As the troops paraded before battle, David appeared to be cautious, as is implied by this brief comment, 'David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish' (v2). David was trying to hide his presence as much as possible.

The rest of our passage is a record of the confrontation between Achish and the other Philistine Kings concerning David, with the result that David was disbarred from the army and told to go as far away as possible from the action. The suspicions of the Philistine Kings were that David would begin the battle on their side and switch to his natural Israelite allegiance in the middle of the battle, creating havoc for the Philistines. There are plenty of records of ancient battles in which such ploys have been used, but we do know whether David planned to do this; war might even have been an excellent cover for him to attack Saul personally in the confusion of war, but this is doubtful given that David had twice refused to kill Saul when he had him at his mercy.

If we look at all this from God's perspective, however, this result was the best possible! David would be many miles from the battle about to take place between the Philistines and King Saul (and we shall see the outcome of this in the next two chapters, the last in 1 Samuel). God's plan was for Saul's reign to come to an end, indeed a death in battle was regarded as highly honourable, and David was protected, ready for his future role of taking the throne of Israel. Furthermore, it was God's plan to place David at the heart of His salvation plan for all humanity, and so his life was supremely precious to God at this

moment, although David did not know this. This is why although the story appears odd, it is in scripture. God achieved His purposes.

Exactly the same applies to us now. When God is pursuing important long term plans in our lives, He has to take into account many different people and situations, and if those plans are vital for our future and for His mission and work, the complexity of what happens may be well beyond our understanding. Things happen which appear peculiar or we have the feel of being somewhat distant from what we expect; then it only makes sense when, from a position of hindsight, we can look back and say 'God was working ...' even though it seemed nonsensical at the time. In the light of this, we do well to have our eyes on the long term aims and purposes of God, and not the oddities of everyday life. This is no mere excuse for the Christian life; this is a hard lesson to learn, and it is a supreme test of trust in the Lord. Would we have kept our nerve as David did in this strange setting, and believe that the Lord would sort everything out in the end?

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Do you think David was aware of God's wider plan for him? Apart from his anointing, what confirmation did David have of his future?
2. Is the explanation in the study too simplistic, what other spiritual messages may be found in this text?
3. In your group, describe to one another any situations in your life that have been inexplicable at the time, but have proved to be part of God's plan for you.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Frankly, I find that a great deal of my life has felt like something of a mystery, and I know that this is the experience of many who have given themselves to the Lord's work. Holding one's nerve in the midst of inexplicable circumstances is certainly something I have had to do, and at times, for many years. What I find most taxing is attempting to keep going whilst you do not know how things will turn out, when you cannot be sure that you have done what is right. It's easy to say 'leave it in the Lord's hands', but it is hard to do.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *To what extent are you in the midst of circumstances which do not make sense and for which you hope that the Lord will resolve or use? Pray about this, preferably with someone who is close to you.*
- *Pray for people you know who are struggling with impossible circumstances of health, ministry or of personal life. If possible, pray with them and give the ministry of comfort and consolation which gives hope for the future.*

Final Prayer

Speak to me, Lord Jesus, when I do not know where to turn; when I am scared of what is happening to me and find it hard to explain or pray about things. Send Your Holy Spirit to comfort and inspire me so I may hand over all my problems to You and deal with them in faith and peace. Thank You, Lord Jesus: AMEN