

## Prayer

The beauty of Your world astounds us, Lord God, and the cruelty of humanity shocks us. Help us therefore, to live according to Your Word, which is the only truth for the world, the yardstick of honesty, the judge of integrity and the motivation for love and care. Show us how to read, hear and use Your Word, and in its light, may we do what is right and good within this sinful world. Help us Lord God, we pray: AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Have you read any book about prayer recently? To broaden your understanding of how Christians have prayed through the centuries, look on the internet or in your local Christian bookshop for books on prayer. I recommend those with examples of prayers used by Christians of past generations.*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for disenfranchised people throughout the world:** Pray especially for the people of Libya who are seeking freedom, and others in the region who are thinking about what they can achieve in the circumstances.
- Pray about the effects of alcohol on young people, especially due to drinks that are targeted at them with cheap prices.
- Give thanks to God for the joy of food and drink, and the privilege of sharing this with others

## Meditation

The Spirit of God would set you free,  
To live in faith and love and hope.

Freedom is the un-constraining of life,  
From bondage to fear and worry and strife.

It is found in harmony with all God's world,  
The searching of the soul for more than self.

It is release from the fear of the devil's grip,  
The defeat of sin, entrusted to Christ.

It is peace in the day and tranquillity at night,  
The bliss of security in the promises of God.

It is won with hard work and dedication,  
The sacrifice of love that gives all for life.

So take the liberty that is yours in the love of God,  
And pursue that of others through His power.

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## Bible passage - Luke 8:16-21

<sup>16</sup> Jesus continued:

'After lighting a lamp, no one hides it under something, or puts it under a bed, but places it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light. <sup>17</sup> For nothing is private that will not be made known, nor is anything kept secret that will not be uncovered and exposed.

<sup>18</sup> 'So be careful how you listen. For those who receive will be given more, and those who do not receive, even what they think they have will be taken away.'

<sup>19</sup> Then Jesus' mother and his brothers came to Him, but they could not get near Him because of the crowd. <sup>20</sup> He was told,

'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.'

<sup>21</sup> He replied,

'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.'

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## Bible Study

### Review

How easy it is to read a passage like this and feel that one knows it! Most of us recognise this plain teaching of Jesus about 'shining one's light' so that others might see (8:16), about the desire of God to make the Gospel known (8:17), about the importance of hearing and receiving the Gospel message (8:18), and about the exclusive nature of commitment to God (8:19-21). Starting here, it is relatively easy to develop these ideas and apply them. The passage can then be used to advocate everything from evangelism to applying God's Word.

These themes are important, but there is much more. These verses are not 'stand alone' teaching, they are part of a larger set of instructions beginning with the parable of the Sower and Jesus' explanation of it, just prior to this. Certainly, the subjects of 'secrets' and 'listening', are found both before and after the parable of the Sower (8:10, 8:17,18). Neither is the story of Jesus being approached by His family merely 'what happened next', for Jesus concludes by praising, '*... those who hear the Word of God and do it*' (8:21). This is very similar to what He says at the end of the parable of the Sower, '*... the ones who ... hear the Word ... and bear fruit*' (8:15).

To begin with, along with most of Jesus' teaching, this passage is about God's Kingdom. Now we should not imagine that this is something 'spiritual' or somehow not 'real'. Jesus announced its coming, and He described it as the rule of God on earth, where people received the Word and did it. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, the Kingdom was established within the fellowship of believers, or as it was later called, the Church. The Church may not be the perfect bride of Christ, but it is where God's 'rule' is found on earth.

We now turn back to our passage. Some think that verse 16 is about being willing to use our faith or talents. This may be good advice, but there is more. Elsewhere in Scripture, Jesus is called the '*Light of the World*' (John 8:12); so instead of equating the light with ourselves, is it not better to equate it Jesus, God's light that must be placed on a lampstand? Surely, as Jesus says, each individual is either an impediment to that light or a means of displaying it (8:16)!

Similarly, verse 17 seems to be about secrets coming out before God, perhaps at the Last Judgement; but Jesus teaches about this later on (chapter 21), and we should be cautious. Verse 17 states a general principle, which is that God's desire is to reveal secrets; all will become known. Of course, God's secret is His loves for people and the whole world, and He will prove this through His Son Jesus, through whom He will save all those who have faith in Him.

Following this, Jesus warns God's people to be careful about how they listen (8:18). When Jesus says '*for those who receive will be given more*' (8:18), He means that true listening involves receiving God's Word to the extent that it changes things. Those who listen without letting God's Word affect them, as Jesus says, will find that '*what they have will be taken away*'.

How awkward it was that Jesus' family turned up just then! It was a difficult moment, and Jesus had to be hard on His family by confirming that His primary loyalty was to those who both heard and did the 'Word of God'. This was the new family of God's Kingdom on earth, and after His death, this would be the Church. At the time, Jesus was referring to the disciples, to whom He was growing closer. Fortunately, Jesus' relatives were not insulted enough to turn away from Him. Mary was present at His death (24:10), and His brother James became a Church leader (Gal 1:19). Nevertheless, by standing firm in this way, Jesus demonstrated personally the important truth that being part of God's Kingdom was not like the Judaism of old where someone could assume a relationship with God by birth. It was about receiving and doing God's Word; and this remains true to this day.

### Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- The Kingdom of God – shining a light (8:16)
- The Kingdom of God - uncovering secrets (8:17)
- The Kingdom of God – membership (8:19-21)

## Notes on the text and translation

### V16 **'After lighting a lamp, no one hides it under something'**

#### Other translations:

*'No-one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar' (NIV)*

*'No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar' (NRSV)*

The Greek word often translated 'jar' is an entirely general word for a kitchen utensil, and it is also used colloquially for a variety of domestic objects. It seems more obvious to translate it in this general way so that we are not tempted to go on a wild goose chase and attempt to find out what the 'jar' means.

### V17 **'For nothing is private that will not be made known ...'**

#### Other translations:

*'For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed ...' (NIV)*

*'For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest ...' (ESV)*

This sentence is a typical example of one that contains two almost identical halves using the same words and meaning almost the same thing. In each translation, you can easily see the 'parallelism'. In this case, the parallelism is for emphasis. We are too used to repeating things or hearing things repeated as a manner of speech without understanding that this figure of speech carries special weight/

### V18 **'and those who do not receive, even what they think they have will be taken away'**

#### Other translations:

*'whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him' (NIV)*

*'and from those who do not have, even what they seem to have will be taken away.' (NRSV)*

The different translations seems very similar, but you will see that the NIV translates this part of the sentence in the singular *'what he thinks he has ...'*. Despite the fact that the Greek verbs are indeed singular, the whole sentence however is a generalised statement, and to make it consistent throughout, it is better for modern English to translate this in the plural.

## Going Deeper

### ***The Kingdom of God – shining a light (8:16)***

In a number of commentaries on Luke, you will read the clear opinion of the authors that verse 16 is Jesus' advice to His disciples to be a 'light shining on a lampstand' (e.g. see the Tyndale Commentary on Luke by Leon Morris). Of course, this is only a step away from what I have written above to suggest that Jesus is the light, for it is certainly our responsibility to convey the light of Christ to the world. The point I wish to make is that it is Christ who should be on the pedestal and not self.

There are many Biblical texts that speak of light as being from God. 'In the beginning' (Gen 1:3,4), God's first act of Creation was to make light, as the energy radiating from Himself within which Creation happened. The psalmist speaks of light as a spiritual gift of God that illuminates the soul; *'It is You who light my lamp; the Lord, my God, lights up my darkness'* (Psalm 18:28), and Isaiah, whose prophecies speak uniquely of the coming of God's servant the Messiah, says *'arise, shine, for your light has come ... all nations shall come to your light ...'* (Isaiah 60:1,3). In each of these references, there is but a thin line between light as a description of something used by God, and light as a description of God Himself.

Such is the power of this imagery that it is unwise to start our interpretation of this passage with anything in mind other than Jesus as the light that must be placed on a lampstand. The significance of this becomes evident in the last part of the verse, which explains that the shining light must be seen by those who wish to 'come in'. The picture of evangelism and church growth presented by this passage is this; Christ is to be presented to the world, and the responsibility of the church is to let Him be seen. No comment is made here about how or why people may wish to 'come in', but the responsibility of the church is to make sure that the light of Christ shines strongly. There is no room here for privatised religion that is hidden away for safe keeping or for fear of the world. On the one hand, God's call requires His people to be very careful about what they do and say, on the other hand, it can be a dangerous and risky call. Not every society wants to see the light of Christ shining.

### ***The Kingdom of God - uncovering secrets (8:17)***

As so often, Jesus' teaching technique is not to stand in front of people and deliver single sentence advice in clear and unequivocal terms. Jesus does not say to the disciples:

Make sure that you give an example of me, not yourselves

Everything will one day be made known, so make sure you are unashamed before God

Listen carefully because you will have to put all I say into practice

Listen to what I say and do it

If the Gospel records had such statements, then the teaching of Jesus would be clear and precise, and it would be possible to set down letter and law for everything people did or did not do. Infringement of any teaching would be intolerable on pain of exclusion from the church. How quickly we would be set into Pharisaic ways, and religion would become a lifelong burden!

Jesus taught using the language of the 'Kingdom of God' in order to make God's ways accessibly human. Clear but not constraining, and requiring the mind to enquire and search in order to find the deeper truths of God. Jesus' words in verse 17 are an important revelation that God is always disclosing more of Himself. Of course, He will not reveal anything that is inconsistent with what He has revealed so far, or He could be accused of inconsistency.

Now the idea that God is gradually revealing secrets is one that we should examine carefully, for Christians claim that in Christ, God is revealing His ultimate secrets, the secrets of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This of course, must be found to be entirely consistent with what God has done in the past, or else God could be said to be inconsistent, either dealing with humanity by deception or changing His mind. It is therefore very important that Christians make the case that the Old Testament points to the New; the prophets must be shown to have foretold the Messiah.

Muslims, however, claim that God has made a further revelation of secrets through the prophet Mohammed, which supersedes that of Christ. But if God had done that, then all He has previously revealed about the Messiah would be found false, because the religious system revealed through Mohammed is startlingly different from that of Christ or the Bible, and Muslim scholars do not maintain links between the Koran and the Bible. The differences however suggest that if Mohammed is right, then God has deceived humanity, so if we believe that God does not do that, then the Muslim faith must be rejected.

### ***The Kingdom of God – membership (8:19-21)***

There is no doubt the 'family' is very important for the Jewish people, so it may have been very hard for Jesus to publicly reject His family in order to point to a higher truth. The Jewish people were tied to God partly by the religious duties of circumcision (males only) and obedience to God's laws, and partly through lineage from Abraham. The history of God's people shows that they struggled to remain faithful to God, and it is perhaps understandable that there should be problems with a faith in which allegiance is identified by obligation rather than choice. Of course, this is dealt with by the Gospel of Christ which always requires an individual response, and in which no one is accepted by default.

For this reason, 'family' can present something of a problem to Christians. For children who are born into a family are naturally regarded as part of a church to which the adults belong, but the time must come when children cannot be spoken for by parents and children must decide whether they have faith in Christ. The church thrives where there is a clear understanding of how a child arrives at such a decision point and how it is helped to make this decision. Where such things are misunderstood or watered down, then the church suffers. It is not so much a matter of the liturgies used as people's understanding of them, and how they reflect the individual's response to God.

It seems that Jesus' teaching here is that however important the family is, allegiance to Christ and His Word is higher. In speaking as He did to His brother and mother, Jesus was only doing what He asked of His disciples, which was to leave behind the security of family in order to follow Him (9:58, 11:27 etc.). Today, this call of duty is one that causes great problems to many people. It is therefore wise to consider this; whatever value we place on the family, God does not wish us to dilute it; but He does require us to place our relationship with Him higher for the sake of His love and our eternal destiny. If we accept this, then all thoughts of sacrificing family for church or God will be tempered with the belief that God has not given us spouses and children just to abandon them for Him. Jesus had to do this because of His special ministry, but by placing God first, most people will find that Jesus requires them to love and maintain family life as a normal commitment of love.

## Application

There is much wisdom packed into this passage of Scripture. To begin with, the job of the Christian is to shine the light of Jesus, so that people are drawn into God's earthly Kingdom, or as Jesus says, '*so that those who come in may see the light*'. It seems that Jesus wants the Church to be a 'shining example' of what is good and godly, and this is a profound challenge. Witness, leadership, church growth, evangelism or any other form of activity must show Jesus Christ to the exclusion of all else, and if pastors, individuals, church buildings or structures assume a higher profile than things have gone very wrong. Unfortunately, where people in society at large perceive the church as self-indulgent, closed or eccentric, then the focus is not on Christ. There is only one way to honour God and His son Jesus, and this is to be an example of love and compassion in a sinful and troubled world.

Other parts of this passage remain very challenging. The verse describing God's nature to reveal secrets can seem very threatening to people who like to keep them. If truth and justice are to prevail in the world, however, no secrets can stand. Everything must be exposed to the justice of God. In general, the Bible is unremitting in its insistence that God will judge all things, and if God's people have not been taught that this is His way, then they have been cheated.

The advice about listening (8:18) is worth our careful attention; Jesus' words can themselves be used as a reminder of the teaching here; '*be careful how you listen ...*'. In the course of life we are used to listening to many things, and we quickly reject what is not of interest to us with hardly a thought. One who is careful in listening to the things of God will thereby learn to discern the difference between God's voice and the voices of this world, and will always be seeking more. Such a person cannot be satisfied with a simple explanation of a Bible text, for example. This is not to deny the importance of simple wisdom, but it is to say that with God, there is always more to discover. As soon as we receive a blessing from the Lord we should expect more, especially in wisdom and understanding.

God's people have always been prone to the belief that if people will only believe, then the later generations will look after themselves. The truth is that when someone becomes a Christian, no faith is handed down to the next generation. A child will receive all the love and care of a parent, but must always be led to make its own decisions. If it is not guided to know that faith must be claimed individually, then some will assume membership of the church by family instead of by choice of Christ, and find themselves in conflict with God's expressed intent. Hearing and doing God's Word is not the preserve of a privilege few, it is necessary for all who choose Christ.

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## Discipleship

### **Questions** (for use in groups)

1. What do people mean by saying '*don't hide your light under a bushel*', and is this a proper interpretation of this text?
2. How can we learn to discern God's voice within the many voices we hear?
3. How important are families to the Kingdom of God? How does the church help families in their responsibilities to God and His Kingdom, if at all?

### **Personal comments by author**

*As so often with a short passage, I found this particularly difficult to work on. The ideas within it are simple, yet the more I looked into it, the deeper I seemed to be getting, and the more I felt that what I have found here should be checked out against what may be found elsewhere. I have often wondered whether I should start a small file of notes, summarising the specific and different teachings of Christ, as I work at them within Scripture. There is so much to embrace, and the whole is as important as its parts. In general, we are used to handling one or other specific teaching, but we are not used to working at how it all holds together.*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Make a list of the teachings of Christ as you come across them in Luke's Gospel. Don't try to be too exact, because it is impossible for any of us to get these things absolutely right, but a quick reference guide will be invaluable, for reference, and for checking out the consistency of our interpretation of Jesus' words.*
- *Reflect on the difference between being a member of a church fellowship and being a member of a family. What does the one teach us about the other?*

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## Final Prayer

Jesus Christ, You are the Word of God, and You are the Light we would shine in our dark world. Make us worthy lamp stands, and bless us as we seek to let Your light shine. May we treasure Your Word and be always ready to hear what You are saying to us in each situation of our lives. Lead us into all truth we pray:  
AMEN

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