

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

Lord God, You have made the day that is before us. Alert us to its potential, and in those moments when we think that nothing is happening, surprise us by the inherent possibilities of the life You have given us. Send us Your Holy Spirit, inspire us by greater things, and fill our souls with the light of Your grace, which cries out within us that all things are possible through Him who has made us. May everything we do give glory to You, Lord God, almighty Lord and Saviour. ALLELUIA!

### Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: WEALTH

**1. For yourself**

*Are you content with what you have? This is a challenging question, but place this question and your response before the Lord in prayer, and see what He says to you*

**2. For your friends and family**

*Pray for any friends you have who are lacking the financial and material means to cope with life. Pray also for any friends you have who have far more than they need, and pray for them that they make their resources available to others in a godly manner*

**3. For the church and its work**

*Pray that the church will use its resources well and 'feed the poor' (and all this implies), as Christ required of His disciples*

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

*Pray for those in your neighbourhood who are lacking financial means, and pray for those who have the finances to help them. Pray for justice and equity in your neighbourhood, and pray that the government of your country will pass laws that are equitable and just for all people.*

### Meditation

There are roads that are waiting for footsteps  
On the route that is narrow and less trod  
There are pathways yet to be followed  
Leading souls to the foot of the Cross

There are heights that are ready to be climbed  
By pioneers of God's Kingdom on earth  
There are mountains yet to be conquered  
To show everyone that God cares for His world

There are valleys that have to be entered  
By all in this tense and tough world  
There are vales of darkness and tears ahead  
But in Christ, these troubles yield peace

There are trials to face and problems for all  
But the Gospel means no one need fear  
Christ has trod each pathway ahead of His own  
He has conquered, and given true hope

Alleluia, our Jesus has died and been raised  
Amen, He has gone to the Father  
Alleluia, He has poured out His Spirit on us  
Amen, so be it, praise God!

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## Bible Study

Bible passage – Acts 2:37-42

<sup>37</sup> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles,

‘Brothers, what shall we do?’

<sup>38</sup> Peter replied,

‘Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’

<sup>40</sup> He spoke to them strongly with many other words, and pleaded with them,

‘Save yourselves from this perverse generation.’

<sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were then baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. <sup>42</sup> They committed themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

### Review

***The response to Peter’s sermon on the first day of Pentecost is extraordinary, and it tells us what God wants for His church. The Gospel is to be preached so that people respond, are baptised, and receive the Holy Spirit, and the church must stay close to the teaching of the apostles.***

Our reading today is well-known, and for good reason. It describes the response to Peter’s first sermon and his appeal to ‘repent and be baptised’, and his plea to his fellow countrymen to ‘save yourselves’. It also records the remarkable number of people who were baptised that day, and offers a simple description of the life of the first Christian community. Few passages of Scripture offer so much of interest, and each phrase and sentence gives insight into God’s will for His church, even today.

People do not respond to Peter’s sermon now in the same way as his first hearers. It is mostly a detailed discussion of Old Testament texts that were hotly debated in the first century A.D., but not today. Also, the purpose of Peter’s sermon was to point out to Jewish people that they had murdered God’s Messiah (2:36), and while many would have rejected this assertion, those who accepted it would indeed have been ‘cut to the heart’ (2:37). Doubtless, many drifted away unconvinced, but Luke’s report focuses on the large number of people who were shocked by what Peter said, and their response was simple enough, they asked, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ (2:37).

We might think that Peter was inspired by the Holy Spirit primarily to preach this great sermon (2:14-36), but he was no less inspired in handling what happened afterwards. This in itself is a message to every preacher, for what use is it to proclaim the Gospel with great eloquence unless proper ‘God inspired’ guidance is subsequently given. Surely, the work of the Holy Spirit at the first Pentecost was not just to inspire a great sermon, it was to guide Peter in saying, ‘repent and be baptised ...’ (2:38).

Verse 38 contains what almost seems like a formula for the early Christian church, but we should avoid thinking like that. Peter’s instructions to the first enquirers are indeed a model response to the Gospel, including repentance, baptism, the forgiveness of sins, and receiving the Holy Spirit. But while many people do indeed walk this path, in this order, others do not. In general, Acts itself suggests that God is not concerned with sequence when it comes to salvation. Later on, Luke reports the conversion of a crowd (4:4, 9:35) with no other comment than this, ‘they turned to the Lord’, and in Acts 10, Cornelius receives the Holy Spirit before he is baptised, but for others, baptism comes first (19:1f.).

So each of the steps in verse 38 is important and necessary, but we should not be dogmatic about them. Peter’s message is that the Christian must turn and repent from sin in order to be Christ’s. Secondly, the believer should take the step of baptism, here meaning water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ; this is to be done not out of conformity, but to share publicly in what it means to belong to Christ. In addition, baptism is ‘for the forgiveness of sins’, for the sinner confesses sin so that the Saviour can save the sinner. Thirdly, the Christian is one who has received the gift of the Holy Spirit, not just one of the Gifts of the Spirit, but the

Holy Spirit himself. Furthermore, no Christian can claim credit in heaven or on earth for having received the Holy Spirit or any of His gifts; they merely expose themselves as sinners saved by God's grace, nothing more, nothing less.

Having pointed out what they should do to those who listened and responded, Peter then launched his final appeal, 'save yourselves from this perverse generation' (2:40). It was this that eventually led to the baptism of around 3,000 people (2:41), the first great miracle after Pentecost by which the church was catapulted into life. From now on, this large number of people would have in common these things, their repentance, baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit, but Peter adds more. The early church was built on a number of basic principles that were as much inspired by the Holy Spirit as Peter's sermon, and the last verse of our passage tells us what they are; the apostles teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer.

Again, these four features of the Christian life are fascinating and essential for the life of the church even today, but they do not constitute an exclusive definition of the church. Other passages of Scripture add other basic ingredients, such as worship (1 Corinthians 14), and contribution (Romans 12:8), for example. The significance of the four in our reading today is that this was what was required of new converts if they were to grow in the things of God and become the foundation of the church.

All in all, this reading today offers us a fascinating insight into what God did to start the church, and what He can still do today. Through His Holy Spirit, God still works today to bring repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Spirit, and He longs to see people rooted in the apostle's teaching, in fellowship, in the 'breaking of bread' and in prayer. These things happen when Scripture is our guide and the Holy Spirit is our inspiration.

## Going Deeper

- Notes on the translation of the passage
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### **Notes on the translation of the passage**

#### **V37 'cut to the heart ...'**

Other translations:

*'pierced to the heart' (New American Standard)*

The Greek words are literally 'stabbed in the heart', but they can conveniently be translated 'cut to the heart' with no loss of integrity. It is not worth trying to do anything else with the sentence, as the New American Standard does (see above).

#### **V37 'to the other disciples'**

This is one of those oddities of the ancient texts, that amongst the many manuscripts available from the four century onwards, nearly all have this phrase as it stands, but one of the most important omits the word 'other'. However, this does not affect the meaning of the passage!

#### **V42 'they committed themselves ...'**

Other translations:

*'they devoted themselves ...' (New Revised Standard Version)*

*'they were continually devoting themselves to ...' (New American Standard)*

The Greek word here means to give close attention to something, perhaps even to be ready. I have avoided the word 'devoted', which is used in most translations, because I do not wish to give the impression that this passage has anything to do with what we call 'devotions'. It is simply the appropriate word for describing the efforts of the first Christian community to live as Christ lived and pay attention to His teaching.

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## Discipleship

Application

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Questions for groups

1. What does this teach us about how we respond to the preached Word of God? How can we best help people respond to what is preached today?
2. What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and how does this differ from what it means to be baptised, if at all?
3. To what extent does the life of your church echo what is found here in this passage of Scripture, especially in verse 42?

Discipleship challenges

- *What would you have to do to take part in everything mentioned in verse 42, in the life of your church? If this is impossible, why is this so? How easy is it for God's people to do what is right within the confines of the established churches today, and what do you see as your place within them? Think about these things carefully, for your future may depend on this.*
- *Pray for those who have recently been baptised, and who seek the things of God. Many are easily led astray, but God will bless those who give themselves to Him in devotion and prayer. Pray that those who follow Christ might find a church in which they are happy; too many do not feel they can be a part of an established church today.*

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## Final Prayer

Thank You Lord God for all that You have done for me and for the life of the church to which I belong. I ask You to help me live my life on the one hand in victory over Satan, and on the other to be loving towards my neighbours and fellow believers. Lead me on the path of righteousness I pray, that I may see my Lord when He calls. AMEN

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