

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

Lord God, Your power and majesty lie behind all creation, and everything I experience in this life. I praise You for the splendour and originality of Your world, for the beauty of a flower, for the power of electricity, and for the intricacy of music. Open my heart and my mind to see You afresh wherever I look, so that my life is filled both with the glory of Your world, and also the glory of Your eternal Word by which all things were created. I praise You, Lord Jesus, ALLELUIA!

### Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: PREJUDICE

**1. For yourself**

*We can sometimes feel that we are the victims of prejudice, or at least the victims of other people's aggressive attitudes. Pray for these people and ask the Lord to bless them*

**2. For your friends and family**

*Pray for any difficult family relationships especially where difficult attitudes prevail. Pray for God's love to be shown and pray for the wisdom to hold on to the love of God at all times*

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

*Pray for those who find themselves outside of the church not because of their lack of faith but because they do not get on with those within it. Pray for God's grace to overcome such difficulties*

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

*Pray against racial prejudice, wherever it rears its head, especially in the governance of countries.*

### Meditation

God has made us needing friendship and love  
And to grow each day through sharing and trusting

By sharing what God has placed on our hearts  
And trusting that others will listen, and care

By sharing together both our trials and joys  
And trusting that in faith, we will help each other

By sharing our frailties in the safety of friendship  
And trusting the respect we owe to each other

By sharing the blessings of our gifts and graces  
And trusting the unconditional nature of love

By sharing the new life we have found in Jesus  
And trusting the unity of the body of Christ

God has given us the potential for glorious fellowship  
So let us enjoy His gift, and bless each other in love

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## Bible Study

Bible passage – Acts 3:1-10

<sup>1</sup> One day, Peter and John were going together to the temple for prayers at three in the afternoon.

<sup>2</sup> Now a man crippled from birth was being carried in to the place where he was put every day at the entrance of the Temple called 'Beautiful Gate', to beg from those going into the temple courts. <sup>3</sup> When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. <sup>4</sup> Peter then looked straight at him, as did John, and he said,

'Look at us!'

<sup>5</sup> So the man turned his attention to them, expecting to get something from them.

<sup>6</sup> Then Peter said,

'I have no silver or gold, but I will give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk.'

<sup>7</sup> Taking him by the right hand, he then helped him to stand, and immediately his feet and ankles were strengthened, <sup>8</sup> and he leapt to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God!

<sup>9</sup> When everyone saw him walking and praising God, <sup>10</sup> they recognised him as the same man who used to sit begging at the Temple entrance called 'Beautiful Gate', and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

## Review

***This wonderful healing story is a remarkable gift of God to all who read it. It was the first miracle to take place in the church's mission to the world, and the first 'act' of the apostles!***

What happened at Pentecost was of course a great miracle of God's sovereign grace in which He acted alone to bless the first disciples. But here in this story, for the first time, the disciples become the agents of God's healing power, and He works through them to bring healing to a lame man. So the story now begins of all that God did through the apostles, and the book of 'Acts' becomes the record of one great miracle after another as God establishes His people, the Church.

Now we read earlier that the disciples went regularly to the Temple to pray (Acts 2:43). Peter and John were going to pray in the afternoon, and as was their practice, and it seems likely that they were going to join with the rest of the young community of believers! Imagine then the scene, for when the lame beggar was healed, all the believers were on hand to see what happened! They had been blessed by the joyous events of Pentecost when God poured out His Spirit on them all (Acts 2:1-4), and now the same Holy Spirit had healed a lame beggar!

The story of what happened is remarkable in itself, and a powerful model for the healing ministry of God's people. It happened as Peter and John were coming into the Temple, and as the lame beggar was being placed, presumably by family and friends, in his usual place (3:2). It would have been easy for the apostles to have passed by, and Peter and John might not have noticed the beggar except that he called out to them for money (3:3)! The Holy Spirit was working to create a 'coincidence' to place this man in the path of Peter and John; God's attention to detail is always far more acute than we imagine!

Peter then stopped and said to the man, '*look at us*' (3:4). Now the beggar would not have been used to people speaking to him. His daily life would have been one of calling out to people and receiving their occasional and often begrudging gifts; he expected no more than money. The Holy Spirit was also working within Peter, however, to inspire the famous words he would say next, which led to the healing of the lame beggar; '*I have no silver or gold, but I will give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ, get up and walk.*' (3:6).

Now God clearly uses words to bless and heal people. Jesus himself spoke healing into people's lives; for example, Matthew reports that Jesus '*drove out spirits with a word and healed all the sick*' (Matt 8:16). But words themselves cannot heal, it is God alone who heals by the power of His Spirit, and the words are the necessary tools of healing blessing, as are the people who say them. In this case, Peter's words draw our attention to the source of power that will heal the lame beggar; he declares out loud that Jesus Christ is the one who can make the man walk.

In addition, Peter does not merely command the lame beggar to be healed, he helps him. In a gesture that reminds us of Jesus' own ministry (e.g., Jesus heals the leper by touching him; Matt 8:3), Peter took hold of the man by his right hand, '*and then helped him to stand*' (3:7). At this, the power of God was let loose and as Luke reports, the man '*leapt to his feet*' and began '*walking and jumping and praising God*' (3:8)! So not

only had God healed this man, he made him a witness to the power of God to heal and save! As we will read tomorrow, the commotion created by this miracle raised something of a storm.

Initially however, those who saw the man *'walking and praising God'* (3:9) immediately recognised that a miracle had taken place. Their reaction was similar to that of the crowd to Jesus' own miracles of healing; they were *'filled with wonder and amazement'* (3:10 Matthew 7:28). They saw before them the clear evidence of someone who had been more than healed; for not only had he received strength and the ability to walk, the miracle meant that he could be independent and have his life back again. He would also have been able to walk through the gates into the Temple to worship God, something that would have been impossible for him as a deformed cripple!

Altogether, this is surely one of the most powerful examples of a healing miracle in Scripture. The story speaks of God's power to bring his people together with those in need, so that miracles of healing may take place, of all kinds. Then, when they are done, they result in the praise and worship of God!

## Going Deeper

- Notes on the translation of the passage
- Which gate of the Temple is 'beautiful Gate'
- Times of prayer in Jerusalem
- Peter's healing technique

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

#### **V1 'Peter and John were going together'**

Other translations:

*'Peter and John went up together'* (New King James)

*'Peter and John were going up'* (NIV)

It is just a small point, apparently, but together with the New King James, my translation includes the word 'together'. Now there is something of a mystery here for those who want to try and track down the 'original' Greek. Many, but not all the most ancient manuscripts begin the verse with the Greek phrase 'epi to auto', which means 'together'. Some scholars think that this phrase belongs properly to the close of the previous verse (the end of chapter 2), where it has the effect of mean 'in the church'. This is because the phrase 'epi to auto' is used frequently in first century church documents to refer to the fellowship of the church. More traditional scholars, with whom I agree, suggest that Luke did not use the phrase in this way, and he is simply telling us that Peter and John went together to the Temple.

#### **V6 'get up and walk!'**

Other translations:

*'walk'* (NIV)

*'stand up and walk'* (NRSV)

The ancient manuscripts are divided on this one; all have the single word 'walk', but only a few of them include the extra words 'stand up and ...', or as I have translated 'get up and ...' It is almost impossible to resolve the arguments about which one reflects the original as written by Luke. However, I have included these extra words because they are like so many other great Biblical events where God tells someone to do something. For example, Jonah is told to 'get up and go' to Nineveh (Jonah 1:1), and the paralysed man is told by Jesus to 'get up and go' (Matthew 9:5).

### **Which gate of the Temple is 'beautiful Gate'**

Scholars have argued for centuries about which gate of the Temple is referred to here by Luke, here in Acts 3. Within the temple compound there were three big gates. The first one was the 'Shushan Gate', the outer gate of the Temple through which one entered in order to go into the outer court of the Gentiles. The second gate was the 'Nicanor' gate also known as the 'Corinthian' gate, leading from the outer Gentile court to what was called the 'court of women', into which only Israelite men and women could go. A third gate led from the court of women to the 'court of Israel', into which only Jewish men could go, and within this court was the 'holy place' where sacrifices were made, and 'the most holy place' where God was said to dwell in holiness.

Church tradition has always believed that the crippled man was placed at the outer 'Shushan' gate, because the story refers simply to the 'entrance to the Temple' (3:2). Nevertheless, scholars have in more recent

times tended to believe that the man was placed at the 'Nicanor', largely because of its size, beauty and grandeur. The Jewish writer Josephus says of the gate that 'it was adorned after a most costly manner having much richer and thicker plates of gold and silver', and it seems to have had a far greater reputation as a beautiful gate, more than the outer gate of the Temple.

It is easy therefore to imagine this great gate of gold and silver being the inspiration for Peter's famous comment 'I have no silver or gold, but I will give you what I have ...'. When we read these words by Peter, we tend to think that these words paint a simple contrast between the money given to the beggar and the gift of God through his Holy Spirit. Alternatively, however, the contrast could be between the grandeur of Jewish religion (as symbolised by the gold and silver ornamental gates of the Jewish Temple), and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the end, the focus of this story is always on the miraculous ability of God to heal the beggar through Peter and John, so we do not tend to worry about why Peter referred to silver and gold and what it meant. Personally, I tend to think that the man was indeed placed outside the 'Nicanor' gate, not the 'Shushan' gate.

### ***Times of prayer in Jerusalem***

The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that the hours of prayer were firstly, at first light; secondly, at the ninth hour, that is around 3.00 pm; and lastly at sunset, when sacrifices were offered (Exodus 23:39). The Temple was generally open to people to wander around and say their prayers as they wished, however, these were the formal occasions when the temple priests would say prayers for the faithful. Mostly, these were given to the male worshippers in the Court of Israel, but they were relayed to the outer courts for the benefit of women and of Gentile converts.

It has been suggested by some that the afternoon time of prayer was the least well attended because people were at work or at afternoon rest. This means then that the disciples were being particularly fervent in their prayers to attend at such a time.

### ***Peter's healing technique***

To pare down what happened on this occasion, we find that as God's healing agents, Peter and John first heard the man call (3:3), then secondly, they gave him their full attention (3:4), they thirdly offered Jesus Christ, boldly, by word of mouth (3:6), and followed this up by assisting the man, physically (3:7). While there can be no standard 'techniques' for performing healing ministry, for Jesus used many different methods to deal even with similar cases requiring healing, this pattern has much to teach us.

To begin with, it highlights the way that Peter and John stopped in the midst of what they were doing to give the man their attention. Luke emphasises the stare given by Peter and John to the man, and this suggests a moment of recognition in which the man, as we might expect, began to believe that he would receive some gift (3:5). But secondly, it marks the moment when Peter and John began to feel by the Holy Spirit that God could do something through them. Their words were not those of people trying something out as if they were uncertain what God would do. They were bold words that showed confidence in God's power to heal. Lastly, the manner in which the disciples assisted the lame man to get up shows that they believed the man would be healed. We can imagine that in the moments when they held hands, the power of God was strong to save and the man received healing power, and consequently praised God.

This was not technique, it was Peter and John being open to the guiding of the Holy Spirit at any moment, and thus being ready for the challenge of this healing, one that would deeply affect the early Christian community.

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## **Discipleship**

### **Application**

#### ***Signs and wonders in the world today***

It is undoubtedly true that God works in healing power not only for the sake of the one healed, but to make Himself known as He so wishes, and according to His eternal plan. In this case, the miracle is clearly a blessing to the lame man, but it is also an encouragement to the church to believe that God was indeed doing works of power in their midst, and that the day of Pentecost was not a 'fluke' incident. So when we see a miracle of God's healing power, we should look beyond the blessing given to His wider purposes, and so often, these are so much more than we think.

I believe firmly that God's people should exercise the ministry of healing, and this should be a source of blessing to people within the church. However, the miracles that God gives us will, I think, point us towards something more, and unless we look for this we will be left with a healing ministry that seems rather selfish

and introspective. God wishes to bless individual people through healing them, but when He does so, His eyes are surely on something far greater than the individual and we are foolish not to look for this.

### ***Miracles and praising God***

Out of all the many things we can discover in this great story, the connection between the miracle of healing and praise is important. When God works in power, the result we should look for is that God is worshipped. I have been present at healing meetings when people say they have been blessed, but there is little evidence of God being worshipped and praised. I reckon that unless God is praised, then the healing is not complete, and people have less than what God intends for them. It is said that people worship God in different ways, some more quietly than others, but I am convinced that this is not the point. Even the quietest people shine through with the glory of Jesus when the power of God is let loose in them. By and large, we have become a people too used to the everyday and ordinary, and we are not open to the glorious things of God.

### Questions for groups

1. What does this great story tell us about God's healing power, and what role is played in it by God's Holy Spirit?
2. Discuss in your group any circumstances that may arise in your life that have similarities to those faced by Peter and John when they went to the Temple that day. What happened?
3. Do all healing miracles result in the praising of God, and if not why not?

### Discipleship challenges

- *Think through you day, and see if there are people around you who are in need, but you are not seeing them. Perhaps there are people in your office or place of work who need help, help which can be only given by God and which you alone are placed to give?*
- *Pray for the sick, and make it a regular feature of your prayer time to pray that God will heal those who are in need. Pray especially for those who are not best helped by the medicines of the day, and whose diseases are 'incurable'*

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## **Final Prayer**

Holy Spirit of God, come fill me with love for those who are disadvantaged in our world and who need Your healing power. May we who are more able be always willing to understand their plight, and may we trust You whose power is to heal and to save. Work through us to bring liberation we pray, to Your praise and glory! AMEN

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