

Prayer

Dear Lord and Father, Your love has no end. You continue to show us love even when we have completely lost our way, and You draw us back to Yourself with the firmness and care of the truest of friends. May we always know that whatever we feel, whatever we do, and whatever we say, Your love is never exhausted, for You are God Almighty: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Sharing Bread and Wine

Give thanks to God for all that the receiving of bread and wine has meant to you and the fellowship of those you know and love over the years. Praise the Lord for the healing, the peace, the challenge, and the stirring of the spirit which has accompanied the communion in your own life's experience. Pray that God's people will continue to honour it.

Meditation

We believe in a God of Love;

Whose Word sustains the universe and all life.

We believe in God's Son Jesus;

Whose life shows the meaning of love and brings peace.

We believe in the Holy Spirit of God;

Who is alive, the power of God, like wind and fire within us.

We believe in the Holy Church of God;

Which is all God's people, the body of Christ our Lord.

We believe in the resurrection and new life;

Which it is our joy and privilege to receive through faith.

We believe in the coming Kingdom of God;

For our future is the world of our Lord's New Creation.

We believe in a God of Love.

Bible Study - Hebrews 10:32-39

³² Now, remember the earlier days when you became enlightened and you stood firm during difficult struggles with suffering; ³³ you were even exposed to public abuse and persecution, together with others who were treated the same way. ³⁴ You shared with those who were in prison and accepted the seizure of your belongings with good grace, knowing that you had obtained for yourselves better and more lasting possessions. ³⁵ So do not abandon your confidence, for it has a great reward; ³⁶ and you will need perseverance to do the will of God and receive what is promised. ³⁷ For in just a short time, 'He who is to come will indeed come and not delay, ³⁸ and he who is my 'righteous' will live by faith. I will not be pleased with anyone who stands back.' ³⁹ But we are not the kind of people who turn back and are destroyed, but are those who have faith and are therefore saved.

Review

Here are words of encouragement for all God's people. They offer spiritual support to people who have had a difficult time since becoming a Christian (10:32-34), including people who had been placed in prison because of their faith. The particular details of such trials, of course, change from age to age; but it is generally true that people who take that great step of faith often experience difficulties either because of opposition from people they know who do not want them to change, or from the spiritual opposition of the enemy, whose express intent is to prevent the young Christian from growing in Christ.

The letter of Hebrews has just delivered a sharp message of warning against those who might turn back from faith and have thereby 'spurned the Son of God' (10:29). Certainly, if you read the previous study on Hebrews 10:26-31 you will have been surprised at the severity of the

warning, issued largely against people who had begun to compromise their faith because of the complexities of trying to live a Christian life in the midst of the institutionally pagan Roman Empire. However, this was reality at the time Hebrews was written, and it was an issue which had to be dealt with. The writer of Hebrews was prepared to face the difficult spiritual facts of what happened when someone rejected faith, but was also deeply concerned to encourage those who were in trouble, persuading them if at all possible to stand firm in Christ, as this passage shows.

The way that the writer encourages his readers to stand firm is to suggest that they recall their first experiences of faith (10:32), and remember that they have survived trials in the past. This should give God's people confidence that they can face all things in the strength of their Lord, knowing that they have obtained 'lasting possessions' (10:34). It is not easy for us to imagine what it must have been like to endure the suffering of early Christians. Early Roman documents describe them enduring all manner of indignities from imprisonment to being publicly 'shamed' in stocks or even being 'thrown to the lions' for sport. We should not forget that some Christians experience equally difficult trials even today, particularly in countries where there is complete intolerance of anyone who does not share the beliefs of the majority, as happens in some Muslim countries. Equally, we should not forget that many Christians sustain prolonged attack from Satan which is designed to undermine true faith at every level, through the temptations of wealth and an easy life. Such trials are not easily seen, but they still rob God's church of thousands in the Western churches, all the time.

For each Christian who stands firm amidst the trials of their own day and their own times, there is 'a great reward' (10:35). This is because perseverance in faith in the midst of a troubled world is the calling of all who love Jesus and await His coming, confident in their hope of glory through Christ. This is what Hebrews means by the quote made from Habakkuk 2:3f. in verses 37 and 38. The original text in the Old Testament reads 'for there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay ... but the righteous will live by their faith' The writer of Hebrews has seen in this prophecy the hope of the Messiah, and instead of reading the passage in terms of 'it', he sees 'the Messiah', who 'will indeed come and not delay' (10:37). This, of course is not an abstract hope, but one which rewards those who 'live by faith' (10:38).

We all need encouragement, and this passage is one which does this by leading us back to the source of our life, our faith and our hope; 'we are not the kind of people who turn back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and are therefore saved.' We do not need anything more in order to persevere in faith than what God has first given us through the gift of His Son Jesus Christ.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What are the most common struggles that people have today with their faith? How can they be overcome?
2. In what ways can we show confidence in our faith? Is it necessary to do anything to show this confidence?
3. Does the prospect of Christ's coming fill you with hope or with dread? Why is this?

Discipleship

Each of us has experienced times when we have not felt sure of some aspect of our faith. At such times, we will be blessed if we take stock of what is happening in our lives. If we do not do this, there is a danger that we will just struggle on and come to accept a spiritual 'problem' as something normal rather than something to be dealt with. It is always best to deal with spiritual problems by sharing them with others, but too many people are not willing to do this! Make sure that you know what you should do when trouble strikes!

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask You to help all those who find it hard to deal with the circumstances of their lives, for whatever reason. We pray especially for Christians who are uncertain about how to deal with their spiritual problems, and do not know where to turn. May we be those who can be used by You to help others, and may we be willing to receive help from others ourselves: AMEN