

## Prayer

Thank You, Spirit of Joy and love and happiness, for Your presence and Your blessing. In a world which seeks these things but drives so many to despair and distress, Your gifts are our treasure and our delight. May we never cease to display these blessings or be ashamed of the mighty God who has given them to us. Thank You Holy Spirit: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Friendship

For all the friends we have, none is like Jesus. In his earthly life, He said 'You are my friends' to His disciples (John 15:14), and He also said these words, through them, to us. If we keep this in mind, our prayers should be like a conversation with Jesus, our divine friend who represents us to the Father. Give thanks to Jesus for His friendship and support over the years.

## Meditation

We can never see the full potential of others in the Kingdom of God;  
For only our Lord knows what He can do with each and every individual.  
He delights to turn all the values and expectations of the world around  
And prove to us that our assumptions about people are too often wrong.

He can

Take the prayers of the old and infirm  
To bless the world, and even to change it!

Take the innocence and charm of youth  
To bring love and stability into the world!

Take the energy of people in later years  
To give wisdom and empowerment to all!

Take the time and passion of young parents  
To be an example to all of real commitment!

And if He can do such miracles of grace in others,  
Just think about what He plans to do through you!

## Bible Study - Hebrews 11:4-7

<sup>4</sup> By faith, Abel offered to God a greater sacrifice than Cain, and in this way he was approved as a righteous man, for God Himself commended his offerings; and he still speaks through his faith, even though he is dead. <sup>5</sup> By faith, Enoch was taken from this life and did not experience death; he was 'found no more' because God had taken him, and before he was taken he was commended as one who pleased God. <sup>6</sup> Now, without faith, it is impossible to please Him, because anyone who wants to come near to Him must believe both that he exists and that those who seek Him are rewarded. <sup>7</sup> By faith, Noah, when warned about events yet to happen took heed, and built an ark in order to save his family; and in this way he condemned the world and became one who receives the righteousness which comes by faith.

## Review

After the powerful description of faith found in the first three verses of chapter 11, Hebrews continues with examples of faith from the Scriptures. The writer draws from the deep well of the Old Testament Word of God with its heritage of stories about famous people who demonstrated godly qualities of faith in times long before the coming of Jesus Christ, and the whole of chapter 11 continues in the same way. Our reading today outlines the faith of three characters from the earliest of times in Old Testament history; they are all from the first 11 chapters of Genesis

which is sometimes called the 'prologue' to the whole Bible. The characters are Abel, Enoch and Noah, and each demonstrates key characteristics of faith.

Abel was murdered by his brother Cain (Genesis 4:1-16) because Cain was jealous of the acceptance by God of his brother's offering and not his own. Abel's offering was described in Genesis 4:4 as 'the best', and Scripture does not give us any other reason to understand why it was more acceptable than Cain's gift of fruit (Gen 4:3). However, after the turmoil of what happened in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3), Abel's offering was what God wanted from His people. It was a sign of hope that even though humanity had been corrupted by sin, it was still possible for someone to appreciate the spiritual value of worshipping God. It is interesting that although people today often quote Abraham as the first example of faith in the Bible (because of the mention of Abraham's 'belief' in Genesis 15:6), Hebrews regards Abel's offering as the earliest example of faith in Scripture. In our reading it is called a 'greater sacrifice', where the word 'sacrifice' refers to ancient forms of worship, so faith is therefore linked to the idea of 'the best in worship'.

The story of Enoch is even briefer than that of Abel, and the relevant text from Genesis says 'Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took Him.' (Gen 5:24). Hebrews does not feel it necessary to make the subject of faith more complicated than it need be, for this example of Enoch is simplicity itself. His walk with God could only have happened on the basis of his faith in the existence of God, as confirmed by Hebrews in verse 6. Even though Enoch was one man who lived amongst many, long before God had chosen 'His people', the description of his being transported to heaven without death implied a supreme quality of faith. This example of faith hints at the ultimate work of God to save all people from the power of death.

The last example of faith in this passage is that of Noah. What Hebrews says about Noah reminds us that what he did could not have happened without faith, though we often forget that although the word faith does not appear in Noah's story, it is fundamentally a story of faith. Noah's 'righteousness' (Gen 6:9) led him to trust God, and by putting his faith into practice in a quite remarkable way, Noah shamed the world and 'condemned' it to God's destruction.

None of these three are irrelevant examples of faith just because we now have the story of the life of Christ and the teachings of both Jesus and Paul within Scripture. They stand as the earliest examples of worship, discipleship and practical faith in the Bible, showing the consistency of God in seeking faith in Him on the part of people throughout the history of the world. Now we have the ministry of Jesus and His priesthood (Heb 7:11f.), there is no excuse for us not to understand the meaning and the consequences of this faith.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. How does the example of Abel's faith inspire God's people today, and how can we live that faith?
2. How does the example of Enoch's faith inspire God's people today, and how can we live that faith?
3. How does the example of Noah's faith inspire God's people today, and how can we live such faith?

## Discipleship

It is easy to think of faith as a very personal thing; something which is deeply individual to us and therefore impervious to attempts by others to say that we should think about it differently. We must not take Scripture lightly, however, and accept that it has a right to challenge us and what we think about our own faith. Certainly, if our own faith is something which is not expressed in worship, in our daily walk with God, or in what we do with our lives, then we are open to be challenged as to whether our faith is truly genuine. Faith is not just a personal experience, it has to be consistent with the revelation of God, or it can be a figment of our imagination!

## Final Prayer

As each day passes, dear Lord, we long to know more of You and feel the touch of Your hand on what we do and how we live. Guide us we pray, not merely through the mysteries of life; its coincidences and happenings, but through Your Word, Your touch and Your positive guidance. Thank You, Lord God, for Your patience in assisting us: AMEN