

## Prayer

Offer your prayers for what God would have you do today;

.....  
Offer your prayers for the people you will spend time with today;

.....  
Offer your prayers for the renewal of God's Church today;

.....  
Conclude your prayers with the 'Lord's Prayer'.

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Appointing Leaders

Give thanks to God for the leaders you have in your church, and pray for wisdom whenever the church has to decide how long its leaders should serve. When such discussions take place, it can mean great stress and instability, or offer great opportunities and challenge. Pray that all involved in such discussions be sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## Meditation

*(a testimony of faith in God based upon Psalm 49)*

Hear this, all you who live in this world;  
Both low and high, both rich and poor:

Why should we fear in times of trouble?  
Those around us trust in property and wealth;  
But everyone is exactly the same before God,  
And no-one can buy from Him everlasting life!

Do not be afraid when others become rich.  
For they take nothing with them down to the grave,  
And nothing they own follows them down to hell  
Whatever fame or fortune they had here on earth!

Remember, wise and wealthy people will die;  
All of them will go, just like fools and animals.  
But God will ransom my soul from the grave!  
And He will receive me in His home for ever!

## Bible Study - Hebrews 3:12-19

<sup>12</sup> Take care, dear friends, that none of you has an evil, unbelieving heart which turns away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But encourage one another daily, while it is still 'today,' so that none of you may grow hardened by sin's deceit. <sup>14</sup> For we have a share in Christ, if only our original confidence is held firm to the end. <sup>15</sup> As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.' <sup>16</sup> Now who was it who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all who left Egypt under Moses' leadership? <sup>17</sup> And who was He angry with for forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies came to grief in the desert? <sup>18</sup> And to whom did he swear that they would not 'enter his rest', but to those who were disobedient? <sup>19</sup> So we can see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

## Review

This passage of Hebrews is a powerful text which contains an important principle concerning the life of God's people. You will recall that in yesterday's text, the writer quoted extensively from Psalm 95, which contains a warning about the stubbornness of God's people in past generations, specifically at the time of the Exodus from Egypt (3:7-11). The consequence of this stubborn nature was sin against God, followed by the failure of that generation to reach the 'Promised Land'

(3:11). Our passage makes crystal clear what was previously hinted at by the writer's use of this quote. Christian people in the church are as much in danger of following the same path of stubbornness, sin and unbelief as the Jews in the Old Testament!

I have often heard people tell me that because of Jesus Christ, we have now been cleansed from our sins, and the problems of the sinful nature of people in the Old Testament are therefore irrelevant to us today. This is a short step away from arguing that the Old Testament has nothing to teach us! But here is a text from the New Testament which appeals to Christian people not to make the mistakes of the Jews, and asks us to learn from the Old Testament! Why does the writer say this? Because he saw people in the churches of his own day repeating the mistakes of the Jews of the past. He saw people preferring the strict religiosity of Judaism, he saw people becoming stubborn in their ways as they aged, and not released in the power of the Spirit as they had been in the early days of their Christian faith. To deal with this, Hebrews tells us that we must learn from the lessons of the past.

Throughout this passage, the writer is concerned that there is a connection between stubbornness, sin, disobedience and unbelief (3:12,13,15 etc) and he labours the point that the eventual consequence of being consumed by such behaviour is physical and spiritual death (3:17). As was said in yesterday's passage and is repeated today, such people do not 'enter into his rest' (3:11,18). Now, it hardly takes much observation on our part to know that all the sin mentioned in this passage is as obvious to us today amongst God's people as it ever was; and the judgement of God does not change. However, within the passage, the writer tells us what we can learn from Scripture about how to prevent these sins becoming a problem in the church.

He begins his appeal in our passage today 'dear friends, take care ...', for he is deeply concerned about the way sin enters the life of the church. But his suggested remedy is that we should 'encourage one another daily', as a matter of urgency (3:13). Secondly, we are to make sure our 'original confidence is held firm to the end' (3:14), and thirdly, we must not 'harden our hearts' (3:15). The urgency of this threefold call in Hebrews should not be taken lightly. There are few churches today where mutual encouragement in faith is practiced in any constructive way; most theological institutions assume that someone's 'original faith' needs re-education, and I find too many people in church committees who insist that they have no intention of listening to the concerns of others and are stubbornly fixed in their own opinions.

Whatever happened to the example of our Lord whose faith and ministry was consistent from first to last; who gave his time constantly to the encouragement of his twelve disciples, and who gave his life for the will of the Father, laying Himself aside? With the writer of Hebrews, we must live according to the example of our Lord; nothing less.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what ways does unbelief enter into the life of the church today? How may this be prevented?
2. Is the Old Testament a help or a hindrance in our quest for Christian faith? (Give examples of your opinions)
3. Discuss how people can encourage each other in faith. Do your suggestions change as culture changes, or are they independent of cultural change?

## Discipleship

There is a challenge within this passage of Scripture for us to encourage each other in our faith on a regular basis. Today, I ask you to consider whether you have a role to play in encouraging the faith of someone else. You may find that you already do encourage others, just by doing what you do and being who you are; but no-one actually tells you this. Try to find ways in the coming days when you can talk with other church people about what you can do to encourage each other in faith, and so fulfil one of the calls from this great text of Scripture.

## Final Prayer

Dear Jesus, when the life of the church to which we belong becomes too much, and we find it hard to understand all that is going on; please give us the grace to persist in encouraging others in the love of Jesus and His saving grace. May we always make this part of our contribution to the church; AMEN