
Prayers

To God

Lord God, our Father, may we take hold of the treasury of life that You have given us with joy, purpose, love and wisdom. Save us from becoming trapped by the sin and evil that creeps up on us unawares, and alert us to our vulnerability. May we always reject the works of the enemy, and may we never fail to accept Your many great gifts; in the name of Jesus we pray; AMEN

For myself

Weekly theme: Feelings about 'church'

Pray about the church you attend, and submit to the Lord your feelings about it, about the people you meet there and how the church is run.

For others

Pray for those who work in the emergency services, and who face different situations every day in service of the community. Give thanks for their work, and pray that they will be properly funded and managed.

Meditation

Lord God, Holy Father, Almighty Saviour and Lord;
Embrace us, empower us, enrich us, inspire us!

Our lives have no meaning without the power of Your Name;
Energising, controlling, motivating, guiding.

Our spirits long to feed on the nourishment of the Father;
Creatively, lovingly, artistically, scientifically.

Our souls crave the love and affection of our Redeemer;
Cherishing, cleansing, nurturing, enlivening.

Our bodies cry out for the healing touch of our Saviour;
Restoring, remaking, reviving, rebuilding.

Our minds thrive on the challenge of living for Your Word;
Intellectually, practically, logically, thoughtfully.

Halleluiah! For this is the abundant love of our God;

For now, and forever, and 'till the end of time!

Bible Passage

Psalm 12

To the worship leader; 'on the eighth'. A Psalm of David.

- ¹ Help, O LORD, for no-one is left who is godly,
and the trustworthy have disappeared from society.
- ² One person lies to another,
speaking with flattery and deception.
- ³ May the LORD cut off all flattering lips
and all boastful tongues
- ⁴ who say, "We will say whatever we want,
our lips are our own; who controls us?"
- ⁵ "Because the poor are devastated
and the needy are in anguish,
I will now rise up," says the LORD;
"I will give them the security for which they long."
- ⁶ The LORD'S words are pure words,
like silver refined in a clay crucible, purified seven times.
- ⁷ You, O LORD, will protect us
and guard us from such people forever.
- ⁸ The wicked strut about everywhere,
while worthlessness is valued by everyone.

Review

Psalm 12 is a remarkably simple Psalm. It is a cry to the Lord from someone who has seen the evils and injustices of society and is appalled. The Psalm begins with a complaint about the evils of dishonest speech (12:1,2), and continues with a request to the Lord to deal with this evil (12:3,4). The Lord will of course do this, a fact that is celebrated in verses 5 and 6, and the Psalm concludes with two simple and contrasting statements that describe the reality of the world in which we live. God will of course protect and guard his people (12:7), even though evil persists all around (12:8).

At the beginning of the psalm, we read a brief introduction, which is different from any other within the Psalms. It seems to contain a musical instruction to a worship leader, with the phrase 'on the eighth'. What does this mean? There are a number of options, but my own opinion is that the phrase 'eighth' is a musical term meaning 'sing in unison' (rather than 'in harmony'), because an 'eighth' defines a standard musical scale, and a musical 'octave'. It may be that the Psalm was sung first in Solomon's Temple, either by priests so that the people could hear it, or perhaps with the people so that they might in part, join in.

Godly people have always had to endure ungodliness within society; sometimes this is easy and sometimes it is not. The first two verses of the Psalm reflect the cry of a godly heart that has grown weary with all this, it is a complaint against those who deceitfully use words to manipulate people and influence events for their own purposes. All those who are concerned about the moral and ethical backbone of society will recognise what the psalm is saying here! Its cry is no casual complaint; it is the product of a heart that strongly objects to evil and longs to find integrity and uprightness within society.

Verses three and four of our Psalm focus on the evils of the tongue, and it is not the only passage of Scripture dealing with this subject. We can find similar pieces of advice in Proverbs (Prov. 10:19,20; 12:18,19; 15:4; 17:4,20 etc.), and the letter of James (James 1:26 and 3:5f.). The power of evil words is considerable, as we all know, and Scripture reminds us here not to forget this. The task of the believer is to pay attention to this, and do everything possible to avoid succumbing to the evils of 'flattering lips' and 'boastful tongues'. It is perhaps understandable that we find the evils of bad language extensively within society, but within the church, surely God's people should actively seek the help of the Holy Spirit to overcome and destroy the evil power of the tongue.

In the middle of the Psalm, the Psalmist confirms the power of God to work within this world to establish justice. Although most of the Psalm has so far been about the evils of bad speech, it focuses here on justice for the poor. It is perhaps true that when there is dishonesty and ungodliness within society, the poor will ultimately suffer, and God wants to liberate the poor. "I will now rise up" says the Lord, 'I will give them the security for which they long.'" (12:5). The writer here speaks like a prophet, for there are few places in Scripture outside of the prophetic writings themselves that use the famous prophetic phrase 'says the Lord'. This is the central highlight of the Psalm; the solution to all life's ills and all evil is the active power of God to do what is right; 'the Lord's words are pure' (12:6).

The Psalm now winds down towards its end, declaring the power of the Lord to guide and protect his own. In the midst of difficulties, we may be blessed by remembering that God has always intervened in history to help and bless His people. Time passes by, and most of us find it hard to see God at work in some of the situations in which we are involved, but when we look back, we undoubtedly see his faithfulness despite the ever present existence of evil all around us. Psalm 12 ends with a reminder of evil's continued presence in the world, 'the wicked strut about everywhere ... worthlessness is valued by everyone' (12:8) but the psalm has already raised the spirit of the worshipper. God's love and His desire to help and save is far greater than any human evil. We all need to be reminded of this from time to time, and Psalm 12 can help.

Discipleship

Application

Controlling the tongue

It is hard to control one's own tongue, especially when the heart is stirred up by something. I have found it hard to read words such as these not because I fail to be encouraged by them, but because I find it hard to keep my own tongue under control. It is not that I swear at people or am known as confrontational, it is just that like everyone, there are times when I speak unguardedly and can 'put my foot in it'. With the best will in the world, all of us will do this from time to time. I am of the opinion that although we cannot avoid offending people simply by having pure motives when we speak, it is nevertheless important that we keep

ourselves as pure in our motives as possible. I have come to the conclusion that God forgives someone for 'getting things wrong' without intending it, but He judges those who, as this psalm says, use the power of the tongue to manipulate and do evil. The difference is clear and important.

Ideas for what to do

- Something to do: Ask yourself whether you have a problem with your own speech, and place the issue before the Lord in prayer. Let Him be the judge of your motives; so do not be afraid if you are doing your best. Nevertheless, ask Him to help you avoid unintended offence to others through your speech.
- Something to pray about: Pray for your local church and for those who find it difficult to tolerate each other because of offence, whether from the past or present. Ask the Lord to bless your church with a heart to be pure in speech, for the good of all.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Can you give examples of when words have been used to deceive or confuse, despite appearing to be honest? Unfortunately the worlds of politics and religion are usually full of such examples!.
2. How do you react when people speak to you aggressively? How often do you speak aggressively to others? How can God help?
3. How does this psalm help God's people today, and how may it be best used in worship?

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, give me a heart that is open to Your will and Your guidance. May I be prepared to go wherever you may call, and may I have the courage to stand against any evil, using the gifts You have given me. Help me to be always willing to serve others, so that God may be glorified in all I do. AMEN
