

Prayers

Opening prayer

Praise You, Lord God, for all that has happened in this last day of my life. Your hand has been upon me both when I have known it and when I have not; and you have touched me for good and blessed me according to Your purposes. Lord God, You have been faithful to me at all times; so I praise you for all that is past, and I trust you for all that is to come. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas_(Alternatives that can broaden the experience of prayer)

At the close of your day, look back over the different decisions you have made and set them before the Lord. Let Him be your judge, and hear from Him whether you have done well or could have done better. Do not be afraid of such a task, for through doing it, you can learn and come closer to the Lord.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who work with the text of Scripture.** *Pray for those who, throughout the church, encourage others to read the Bible, through preaching, through organising Bible reading scheme, or teaching.*
- *Give thanks to God for your sight. Pray also for those who have lost sight either in one eye or in both, and whether partial loss or complete loss*
- *Pray for those who face unemployment. Pray for the economy of your country and for those who govern it*

Meditation

When change is all around you,
think of Jesus, for He has changed the most.
His song is sung from life to death,
and back again from death to life, encircling all,
but bringing all who will to God's triumphant end,
Which is not death, but life.

What people fear the most, may not be death itself,
but what may lie beyond the grave;
As seen from this side, who can tell
the rigours of this path and its eventual end?

The greatest test will come
if we will let God's song be sung in us;
For then the death we fear is changed to life
by Him in whom we trust,
and all the glorious promises of God
come good in hope.

Sing Your song of love, Oh Lord,
and touch and melt the hearts
of those who stumble still;
Stay with us, Lord, who travel on from life to death,
and thence we pray, to life again,
with You.

Bible Study

Bible passage – Psalm 18:1-6

For the worship leader. Of David the servant of the Lord. He sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said:

- ¹ I love You,
 O Lord, my strength.
- ² The Lord is my rock,
 my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock,
 in whom I take refuge.
He is my shield
 and the power behind my salvation,
 my stronghold.
- ³ I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise,
 and I am saved from my enemies.
- ⁴ The cords of death entangled me;
 the floods of godlessness terrified me.
- ⁵ The cords of the grave coiled around me;
 death traps confronted me.
- ⁶ In my distress I called to the Lord;
 I cried to my God for help.
From His temple He heard my voice;
 my cry came to His ears.

Review

Psalm 18 is the first lengthy psalm within the whole collection, and throughout, it is a magnificent statement of the saving work of God. Much of it is the same as 2 Samuel 22, and for this and other literary reasons, scholars reckon that this is one of the earliest psalms, written around a thousand years BC. Written centuries before Christ, it goes on beyond our reading today to speak of God's power to deliver His people from their enemies (18:16-19) and bring them justice and righteousness (18:21-30), and also His personal care for those who love Him (18:31-35) and His desire to grant them victory over evil and death (18:4-6 and 18:49,50).

Immediately before it begins, Scripture gives us a lengthy introduction to Psalm 18, which sets the scene. The words of this introduction are identical to 2 Samuel 22:1, and if we look back to this part of Scripture we can easily discover the true background to this great song of redemption. It was sung by David not when he gained power in the middle of his life, but towards its end. In David's latter years, the Kingship of Israel had been threatened by a revolt led by David's son Absalom. The story of how David eventually overcame this tragedy and returned to Jerusalem concludes the stories of his reign found in 2 Samuel, and this song, Psalm 18, is sung by David as praise to God for everything He has done to help him, throughout his life.

The psalm begins with a bold declaration to God, '*I love you ...*' (18:1). This is David's great cry to God, and if you read the introduction, you will see how the one flows into the other, in order to emphasise this great characteristic of God's love. The rest of the Psalm then declares the nature of this love of God, especially in helping His people, and 'saving' them.

The word used for 'love' (18:1), is one of a number of Hebrew words for 'love', but it is not the great Hebrew word 'Cheseth' ('faithful love') found elsewhere throughout the Psalms referring to the faithful, everlasting, Covenant love of God. Neither is it the other common Hebrew word for love 'Ahavvah', which describes God's love as unconditional. Here, it is the word 'Raham', meaning the love of emotional affection. This word is used in the Old Testament to describe strong human commitment, and it reminds us that love is an essential part of faith, for one who does not feel love towards God is unlikely to accept His grace and His gifts.

Whilst we traditionally focus on 'faith' as the proper response to the saving work of God, we should remember that it is also about love. For example, Jesus called on His disciples to '*love God ...*' and '*love*

your neighbour ...' (Matt 22:37,38). Psalm 18 conveys the idea that our love of God is inseparable from what we call faith; these two are partners, making up the proper human response to God. Certainly, Paul places these great qualities alongside each other on a number of occasions, notably in his famous 'hymn of love', 1 Corinthians 13; 'these three remain, faith, hope and love ..' (verse 13).

David had been touched deeply by God's love and care during his difficult and complicated life, and he loved Him. He called to the Lord for salvation and received deliverance from his enemies on many occasions, as found from 1 Samuel 20 through to the end of 2 Samuel. David speaks of the characteristics of God as a 'rock', and 'deliverer', 'fortress', 'shield', and much more (18:2,3). Each word describes some way in which God works to help His people practically, to show them His love and care. Most of them are used throughout Scripture and some become significant in the New Testament, for example, in Paul's description of the 'whole armour of God' (Ephesians 6:13-20).

The second half of our reading today speaks of David's deliverance from all manner of evils, beginning, '*the cords of death entangle me ...*' (18:4, see also Jonah 2:5). This is one of a number of Hebrew expressions that speaks not of death itself, but of being imperilled to the point of being in fear of death. Certainly, this is what David experienced, whether at the hands of Saul (1 Samuel 22:1f.), or in later years, from those who wanted to take his throne from him (2 Sam 15:14). What set David apart as a man of God was his ability to turn to God in such situations, and trust Him to help; in due course, this meant that he loved God, and he therefore spoke of Him in this way.

Altogether, these verses speak to us not just of God's saving love, but also the love that His people have for Him because of their knowledge of His salvation. This may be why the psalm has captured the imagination of so many through the ages; the first three verses alone being reflected in countless songs and hymns. Remember, though, that at the heart of the Lord's saving work is 'love'. Today, we can freely sing this Psalm because our faith is a loving relationship with God, through Christ.

Discipleship

Application

Prophecy, the spiritual extension of a natural human gift

Most people have an ability to challenge the present and predict what will happen in the future. The difference between this and prophecy is the indwelling Spirit of God, which speaks the word of God into the human heart. In this sense, prophecy is the godly extension of a natural human gift. Perhaps, if more people thought of it in this way, they might realise that the gift of prophecy is not just a special gift for especially holy people; it is something God can do through all His people. Unfortunately, there are many in the world who try to take advantage of people's desire to look into the future; spiritualists, astrologists, and the like. The sooner we accept the prophecy is something that God desires to do through almost all of us, the sooner we will keep these deviants at bay.

Questions for groups

1. What do you think of when Scripture speaks of God as the one who 'saves'? How has God 'saved' you and from what have you been 'saved'?
2. What does 'prophecy' mean to you? Measure this against the definition given in the notes
3. How would you describe your 'love' of God? What words would you use to convey this love to Him?

Discipleship challenges

- *How do you praise God within your everyday life? This is not an easy question for some to answer, but try to do so. Whatever your answer, try taking some of the words of this Psalm, perhaps verses 1 or 3, and use them regularly as a means of praising God in the midst of the day.*
- *How do you deal with difficulties within your everyday life? Again, this is not an easy question to answer. Try taking the example of this Psalm, and putting your frustrations and difficulties to the Lord in the form of a brief prayer, as we find in verses 4 to 6 of today's psalm.*

Final Prayer

If You have blessed us this day, we thank You O Lord. If Your present blessing has been held back so that we might gain Your eventual blessing, we also thank You O Lord. If You have withheld Your blessing because of our sin, may we confess and so receive the blessing of Your forgiveness. We thank You, Lord God, for You are always ready to bless: AMEN
