

Prayers

Opening prayer

Jesus, Lord of all, touch my mind and activate my intelligence, touch my emotions and make sense of my inner feelings, touch my heart and energise my desire to do Your will. Then according to Your gracious compassion, show me my faults, liberate me from my sins and flood me with Your Spirit. For I long to be fulfilled as one of Your servant, Lord Jesus. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas *(Alternatives that can broaden the experience of prayer)*

Look at the sky, and think about the vast expanse of the universe, and in this context, God's almighty and creative glory. Praise God for the magnificence of his creation.

On-going prayers

- **Pray this week for 'industry'**. *Pray against bad practices and industry, the payment of excessively low wages, the manipulation of markets, and anything that cheats a worker out of fair wages*
- *Pray today for people who are travelling on long journeys. Pray for safety and pray for God's blessing*
- *Give thanks to God for your home, and everything in it that you value personally*

Meditation

Let it be; for sometimes,
we must leave things in the Lord's hands.

When there are no answers to our questions,
He will speak to us in the silence of love:

When evil seems to hold everything in its grip,
He will send His Spirit's fire to crush the enemy:

When there is nothing we can do to help,
He will charge His angels to bring comfort:

When love has been tragically compromised,
He will rise in righteousness to reveal the truth!

When there is no time left to do what is right,
He will take up what we must leave undone:

Let it be; for in His hands
we find our safety, both now and always.

Bible Study

Bible passage – Psalm 18:31-45

- ³¹ For who is God besides the Lord?
And who is a Rock except our God?
- ³² It is God who equips me with strength
and gives me a safe journey.
- ³³ He makes my feet like the feet of a deer;

- He enables me to stand securely on the heights.
- ³⁴ He trains my hands for the art of battle;
my arms can bend a bronzed bow.
- ³⁵ You give me Your shield of salvation,
Your right hand sustains me
and Your humility makes me effective.
- ³⁶ You give me space in which to walk,
so that I do not slip on my ankles.
- ³⁷ I pursued my enemies and overtook them;
I did not turn back till they were destroyed.
- ³⁸ I wounded them so that they could not rise;
they fell under my feet.
- ³⁹ You equipped me with strength for battle,
and have made me victorious
over those who fought against me.
- ⁴⁰ You made my opponents flee in defeat,
and I destroyed my enemies.
- ⁴¹ They cried for help, but there was no-one to save them,
to the LORD, but He did not answer.
- ⁴² I beat them as fine as dust carried in the wind;
I threw them out as mud in the streets.
- ⁴³ You have delivered me from the people's strife,
and You have made me a leader of nations;
people I did not know are subject to me!
- ⁴⁴ As soon as they hear me, they obey me;
foreigners cringe in front of me.
- ⁴⁵ They all lose heart
and come trembling from their strongholds.

Review

Throughout Psalm 18, we hear the echoes of David's life. Indeed, the superscription at the beginning of the Psalm says that David sang it on the day he defeated King Saul. We can well imagine his emotions, reflecting on the glories of the past, on years of difficulty and trouble when pursued by King Saul, and finally achieving victory over his great foe. All these sentiments are expressed in the verses of Psalm 18 previous to our passage today, but here, we see him in the aftermath of battle, reflecting on the mighty work of God by which he has achieved victory.

So it is that David begins this part of the Psalm by calling upon God, who has been his 'rock' over many difficult years (18:31). God has given him strength and safety (18:32,33), and has enabled him to stand firm (18:33). Verse 33 contains a wonderful vision of security; David pictures a deer standing high on a rocky mount, serenely surveying everything around. Now in more recent times, Christians have turned to this passage of Scripture for devotional inspiration, for this picture inspires us with its marvellous description of both the effort of the deer to rise to high ground and the provision of God who enables it to stand firm, '*on the heights*'.

The Psalm continues with a series of stanzas, each possessing its own emphasis, and adding to the picture we have already painted. In verses 35 and 36, David acknowledges that God has given him victory and has saved him. This is what he means by saying '*You give me Your shield of salvation, Your right hand sustains me*' (18:35). This phrase is interesting to Christians because it contains a reference to a '*shield of salvation*', something mentioned in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and the first item in his '*whole armour of God*'. This picture of God's work reminds us that it is He who makes us victorious in the battles of life.

The next stanza (verses 37 and 38) changes tack, for David now speaks about his own achievements (you can see that the previous stanza, 18:35,36 is addressed to God using the word 'you', but this one uses the word 'I', referring to David). You could say that David is blowing his own trumpet here, but we are perhaps too critical. For God certainly requires that His people put in some effort to achieve what is right, and everything David says here in these two verses reveal that he has indeed done this. It is obvious from the whole of the Psalm that David gives God all the glory for what has happened, but he does not sit back and

expect God to do everything for him, for he has fought for these victories, he says, '*I pursued my enemies and overtook them ... I wounded them ... They fell under my feet*' (18:37,38).

After saying this, David immediately gives thanks to God for His provision, and verses 39 and 40 continue the theme of praise that weaves throughout the Psalm. David gives thanks to God for the strength to do battle (18:39), and he perceives that because God has given him strength to fight, the victory belongs to Him also. He says, '*You made my opponents flee in defeat ...*' (18:40). This is a helpful reminder to us to give thanks to God for his provision in the midst of our own life's battles.

Verses 41 and 42 are rather different. Here, David appears to gloat over those he has defeated, he says, '*they cried for help, but there was no one to save them*' (18:41). In truth, David is rejoicing in his relationship with God, and the fact that God has blessed him and given him victory over his enemy king Saul. However, verse 41 is akin to saying that God was not with King Saul or his servants but with David, God was on David's 'side', hence his victory. This may have been clear enough in Bible times, but today, we are cautious about claiming that God is 'on our side'. The history of war in recent centuries is testimony to the fact that too many people believed God was on their side and as a consequence fought with each other with such force that millions died (especially in the First World War). But we should not mistake this caution for what is said here, which is about the leadership of God's people Israel. In the affairs of His people today, God always has a plan and He is working to put that into effect through leaders of the church. He is on the side of those who are doing His work and achieving His plan, and His blessing is withdrawn from those who will not do it. This is something for God's people to reflect upon.

This part of Psalm 18 closes with three remarkable verses. Here David gives thanks to God, because the results of his victory are far more than he could possibly have imagined. To begin with, he says, '*you have delivered me from the peoples strife*' (18:43), a phrase that accurately describes the state of Israel before David's victory; they were a people riven by trouble and strife. But God made David a leader not just of His own people, David says, '*You have made me a leader of nations, people I did not know are subject to me!*' (18:43). It is a remarkable fact that as soon as David becomes king of a united Israel, the neighbouring nations are drawn to Israel and the boundaries of the nation are extended to include them (2 Samuel 8:11). David attributes this to the fact that the God who has been victorious in battle is more powerful than the nations had previously imagined, and they come trembling to pay their respects (18:44,45).

There are many wonderful pictures within this part of the Psalm 18, though they are not immediately obvious. It would be easy to read through it and gain little inspiration, but by looking back at the life of David and the time when he defeated Saul to become King of all Israel, these words come alive. At the very least, they have much to say to God's people about keeping close to Him, doing His will, and therefore reap the rewards of His victory.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Discuss whether this Psalm can help God's people understand spiritual warfare. What lessons does it teach us?
2. In your group, summarise your understanding of each stanza of this passage.
3. What two verses 43 to 45 tell us, and how does this apply to the life of God's people today.

Discipleship challenges

- *There is a battle going on in the world today for the proclamation of Gospel. What contribution can you make to this, and are you willing to make it? Think carefully about these things. The language of this request maybe a little unfamiliar to you, but the language of spiritual warfare is important within Scripture. It teaches us to remember that we are fighting against evil. In what ways are you fighting against evil?*
- *What do verses 43 to 45 mean for God's people today? Does the church expect that those outside of His will be drawn to it? If it does not it may be that it has ceased to wage war against evil, and thus expect its rewards. Pray that God people will take up the call of Jesus Christ against evil within the world, wherever it is found, and so gain His victory, and reap His rewards.*

Final Prayer

God and Father of all, and grant that we praise You may spend our lives in praise of Your Holy name. We thank You for redeeming us through Jesus Christ Your Son and enabling us to live victorious over the enemy through all of our days, be they many or few. We owe everything to You, Lord God; AMEN
