

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, restore my life when I have failed; chase away the burden of my sinfulness and make me new again. You have done all that is needed to save my soul, so forgive my wayward heart which wanders from the pathway. I stand here before Your throne of grace to declare my love and confess my sin; receive my prayer, Lord Jesus. Lead me on my path, keep me on Your side, and hear my prayer: AMEN

### Prayer Suggestions

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

*Read a favourite passage of Scripture out loud; for example, Psalm 23, or Eph 1. Let these great words inspire your prayers.*

#### **On-going prayers**

- **Pray for countries in turmoil.** *Pray for Sudan, and other countries in the Arabian peninsula that are experiencing significant political upheaval. Pray for God's will to overrule religious opportunism and personal greed*
- *Give thanks to God for the forces of law and order on which we rely for peace and security. Pray that they will be employed wisely in each area of work they are required*
- *Pray for the financial markets across the world as they continue to reflect badly on the political and financial state of significant world powers such as the USA and various countries in Europe*

### Meditation

We all grow old, my friend.  
But do we age in heart and spirit  
as well as in the body?

How blessed are they who age  
but keep a certain youthfulness of heart  
and maturity of spirit,  
rejuvenated daily through a living faith,  
revived by God's own gracious love  
and always hopeful of the best.

Is it age that makes God's Kingdom  
appear more beautiful as it comes?  
Do not fear my friend.  
We will go there assuredly  
if we now let ourselves be caught up  
in the wind of faith and all its loving.

The heart will make its choices  
and the spirit follow its leads  
but the peace that's found in later years  
comes through a choice of faith.  
It is God who makes the living  
and who grants new life again!

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## Bible Study

Bible passage – Psalm 20

For the worship leader. A psalm of David.

- 1 May the LORD answer you in time of trouble;  
the name of the God of Jacob protect you!
- 2 May He send you help from the sanctuary  
and give you support from Zion.
- 3 May He remember all your sacrifices  
and accept your burnt offerings.  
  
Selah
- 4 May He give you your heart's desire  
and make all your plans succeed.
- 5 We will shout for joy over your victory  
and raise our banners in the name of our God.  
May the LORD grant all your requests.
- 6 Now I know that the LORD helps His anointed;  
He answers him from His holy heaven  
with the saving power of His right hand.
- 7 Some rely on chariots and others on horses,  
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.
- 8 They will collapse and fall down,  
but we rise up and stand firm.
- 9 O LORD, save the king!  
Answer us when we call!

## Review

Here is an extraordinary psalm, which speaks to us today with no less force than when it was first used to encourage God's people prior to battle. In order to study it, we will look firstly at what it may have meant to those who first used it, and we will go on to look at how it can be used today. It may be tempting to pick out the verses that speak of God's blessing, such as verses 4 and 5, and ignore the rest, but that would be foolish. As a whole, this psalm can help us gain some perspective on the battles of life we face today.

Psalm 20 raises the picture of Israel assembling to fight an enemy, and its inspiration comes from the life of David. Throughout his life, he faced many battle as he strove to establish and defend the nation he had been anointed to lead, as did his descendants. The books of Kings and Chronicles give us insight into the turbulent times in which the people of Israel lived. Our psalm originates in such times, but it speaks to us now of so much more. Specifically, it offers us guidance, encouragement and spiritual support. But if we delve further into what it meant for Israel, we will find this, and more.

It begins with a cry for help to God, but it is more than a mere cry. The words '*may the Lord answer you in time of trouble*' (20:1) read more like someone encouraging troops; they are a reminder to us that we both can and should help each other in our spiritual battles. We all need encouragement ourselves, and we need to encourage others as well. Of course, the best encouragement and help comes from God, or as the people of Israel said, '*from his sanctuary*' (20:2).

It is a bit presumptive to ask God for help if at other times He is ignored. So in verse 3, the Psalmist refers back to the many previous acts of sacrifice made by God's people in their worship (20:3). Now the form of this worship is very different from what we offer today. In general, Israel worshipped God through the offering of sacrifices (see Leviticus 1f.), but before a battle they offered a special sacrifice, a 'whole burnt offering' (for an example, see 1 Sam 7:9-10, and 9:13f.). In this way, the Israelites sought the protection of God's favour and His help during battle. Something similar is true for us, for our regular worship is the proof of our love of God, whose protection we seek. Prayers before battle will also focus us on the power of God who alone can save us.

The Psalm continues after a brief break indicated by the word '*Selah*' (20:3), encouraging Israel to believe in the success of God's plans and looking forward to the raising of banners in victory celebration. In ancient times, banners were lifted before battle so that everyone could see the rallying point for attack or retreat. Banners were much more than symbols; they were the focus for life and death decisions in battle; it is not too hard to imagine or to perceive that for a Christian, the banner is Christ.

In verses 6-8 the King speaks on behalf of the army, after receiving God's blessing, perhaps delivered by priests. He is confident in the Lord's provision, and mocks the strength of his opponents (the chariots and horses – verse 7). Lastly, the people acclaim their King and proclaim God as their Saviour with a shout – 'O

*Lord, save the king! Answer us when we call!* (20:9). The nation was about to go into battle, and it was a life and death matter. Defeat would mean the destruction of their way of life and all Israel held dear, but with God's help, and a god-fearing king in charge, they were confident of victory.

What can we learn from this Psalm? To begin with, it says something about the nature of good leadership. In David's time, the people turned to their king as God's representative and leader. Such leadership is something God still uses today, for while there is much value in collaborative or team leadership in times of peace (we find more about this in the letters of Paul), singular leadership is important. It comes into its own when God's people face an enemy and a battle must be fought, and although the church rarely faces the threat of physical battle, it certainly faces the threat of spiritual warfare.

When studied in depth, this Psalm says even more about fighting life's battles. Its final point is perhaps the most telling. It encourages God's people to stand firm in faith, believing that God will always help his people with *'the saving power of his right hand'* (20:6), and with the words *'O Lord, save the King!'* (20:9), it encourages them to accept the leadership of God's anointed. We would be wise of us to do the same.

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## Discipleship

### Questions for groups

1. How does this psalm help Christians deal with their battles?
2. What does it mean for Psalm 20 to say *'He gives you your heart's desire'*, and how can this be misinterpreted?
3. What does it mean for a Christian to *'raise a banner'*? How do we show the world that we trust in God?

### Discipleship challenges

- *What battles have you faced in your Christian pathway? Think back over such times and work out how you overcame the enemy and found peace. Write down how it was that God helped you. Take the first opportunity you have to testify to this in church or fellowship.*
  - *Watch the news one evening and as you do so, think carefully about what may be on the news that reflects God's will and what is contrary to it. Sometimes we react to news more with our 'gut' than any reasoned thought, so do your best to apply some godly wisdom to it instead!*
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## Final Prayer

I trust in Your Name, O Lord; 'Emmanuel', meaning 'God with us. You, Lord Jesus, are God, You are with me, and You have come into my life and changed my life forever. You are my companion and my guide, and You are my Judge and the source of all my comfort and joy; stay with me forever, I pray, and lead me through the perils of this life to greater things: AMEN

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