

Prayer

Lord God, we offer You our hopes and dreams, our thoughts and feelings, and our faith and deeds. Align each of these with the priorities of Your Kingdom and Your eternal plan, and grant each of us joy and happiness as we live as Your disciples according to Your call. Thank You for calling us and using us, Lord God; may we always serve You according to Your will. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Travel

Pray about your own travel. Ask the Lord to help you decide whether it is all necessary and whether you should look at alternatives or seek to avoid unnecessary travel.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the gift of time and a weekend to use it!
- Pray for the United Nations, for it to help nations work together
- Pray for the success of attempts to build world financial stability

Meditation

Jesus, what do You see when You look at us?

Do you see disciples who are committed to You?

Do you see people who live as if they know

That without Christ, sin holds sway in this world?

Do you see people who read Your Word,

And seek the fullest understanding of Your Gospel?

Do You see people energised by the Spirit

Transformed by the redeeming power of Your love?

Do You see people motivated to do Your work,

Confident You can use them to change the world?

Do you see people who talk to you in prayer,

Who share everything with You, in complete trust?

Do you see people who are completely obedient,

Willing to do whatever You ask, at whatever the cost?

Jesus, what do You see when You look at us?

Tell us the truth, for this, and this alone, can set us free.

Bible Study - 1 Thess 2:1-8

¹ You yourselves know, fellow believers, that our coming to you was not in vain;

² for though we suffered and were shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we took courage in our God to declare the gospel of God to you in the midst of much opposition. ³ For our appeal does not arise from deceit, impure motives or trickery, ⁴ but because we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even as we speak it, not to please people, but to please God who approves our intentions. ⁵ As you know and as God is our

witness, we did not come with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; ⁶ nor did we seek praise from people, either from you or from others, ⁷ (though we were able to make demands as apostles of Christ) but we were gentle among you, like a nurse caring tenderly for her own children. ⁸ We cared for you so much that we were content to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our very own selves, because you became very close to us.

Review

This part of Paul's letter tells us that the events surrounding the founding of the church at Thessalonica had made a deep impression on Paul. We can read all about this in Acts 17:1-9, and it is a fascinating story, though told by Luke in a rather minimalistic way. It seems that Paul wanted to stress to the Thessalonians that the work he and his companions had done amongst them was not an act (as we might say) designed to help them gain sympathy and hospitality (2:3). He stressed that what had happened at the time of their visit was indeed a part of God's divine plan (2:4) for the preaching of the Gospel, but more than that, Paul and his companions had experienced the true fellowship of friendship. He spoke with warmth about the honest sharing that had taken place (2:5,6), their appreciation of the provision made for them as visitors (2:7) and the care with which they handled the situation. The last verse of our passage, verse 8, is one of the best descriptions of true Christian fellowship found in the New Testament; 'We cared for you so much that we were content to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our very own selves, because you became very close to us.'

True Christian fellowship is a great gift, and one that makes a tremendous difference to the work of the Gospel. Quite clearly, Paul felt comfortable with these people, and as a consequence, although the visit to Thessalonica was brief, it was productive. Acts tells us that after a disturbance had been created in the city because of the preaching of Paul and Silas, the mob that gathered failed to find Paul and Silas. They set upon one of the newly converted Christians called Jason, with a few others, and hauled them before the local magistrates. They managed to escape any judicial sentence, but appear to have been more concerned for the safety of Paul and Silas than themselves (Acts 17:9,10). They were keen to see the evangelists extracted from personal danger, and they moved them quickly on their way to Beroea (Acts 17:10). We know that Christian fellowship is truly at work when people are generous of heart in such ways, and all of us respond well when we see the evidence of the care of other people for our well being.

Christian fellowship is not just about the common decency of looking after one another, however important that may be. There is more to it than that. In our reading, we can see that Paul appreciated the frank and open discussions they had at Thessalonica (2:3f.). When he said 'we did not come among you with words of flattery or with a pretext of greed; nor did we seek praise from people ...' he was describing the proper context for sharing the Christian Gospel. It is often true that people are won for Christ when they feel respected and challenged within open honest discussion, and not manoeuvred or manipulated. There is a place for preaching in evangelism of course, but the place of honest discussion and frank sharing is just as important. Indeed, although the purpose of preaching is to enable the Spirit to convict people and obtain a response, many Christians gain their deepest understanding of spiritual things by talking things through with others in fellowship. This is what is likely to lie behind Paul's otherwise strange comment at the end of our passage; 'we cared for you so much that we were content to share with you not only the Gospel of God but also our very own selves ... you became very close to us'.

We cannot overestimate the importance of Christian fellowship and being close to others through shared experiences and worship, through sharing the faith, and through growing

together in Christ in Bible study and prayer. When people 'move churches' today because of having to move house for example, people often suggest that they are attempting to find a church with a manner and style of worship with which they are comfortable. This is an important issue for some, though we should be careful not to allow preferences in worship to dictate our decisions, when worship is by nature an offering to God and not a matter of choice! However, it is my experience that most people are really seeking a fellowship that exhibits a sense of caring and of being cared for, and also an honesty of sharing that is open and empowering. It is right for a church to seek to ensure its fellowship visibly honours the example of love, care and service given by Christ Himself.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss what elements of Christian fellowship are found within Paul's comments here to the Thessalonians.
2. In what ways does the Gospel of Jesus Christ appear to some people to be a form of 'trickery' or a 'pretext for greed'?
3. How can Christians best care for one another today and demonstrate to the wider community the benefits of the Kingdom of God?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I have known churches where there is great fellowship and churches where there has been little. Personally, I feel that there is little point in being a member of a church where there is little sense of being 'cared for', but such fellowship naturally works both ways. We must care for others so that they will care for us! As I read Paul's comments here in this passage, I am challenged about the importance of contributing to the life of the church in such a way as makes fellowship truly 'work'.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *How can you contribute more to the fellowship of your local church, and how could this help improve the witness of the church community? It may be that you have been hurt by things that have happened, but such things must be given over to the Lord and not allowed to affect the church's witness to the Gospel.*
- *Pray for those who feel unable to contribute much to the fellowship of the church because of time or family constraints. Pray that the Lord will help people see that the more they give, the more they will receive in fellowship.*

Final Prayer

Thank You, heavenly Father, for the gift of those we love and cherish. Thank You for the way that they enrich our lives, for the way that a smile can turn our day around, and for the way that we can testify to the joy of living together in peace and harmony. Sustain us in our families we pray; AMEN