

## Prayer

Lord God Almighty, You have made a truly magnificent world, and You have given us the pleasure of living in it! Give us a heart that always sees its beauty and offers praise, always seeks its truth and offers thanks, and always pursues its good and fights the wrong. With all Your people throughout the world, we give You praise and glory; Hallelujah! AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Food

*We will pray this week for the subject of food, and there are far more issues here than we can cover. Pray today for the food industry in general, and let the Holy Spirit lead you.*

### On-going prayers

- Pray for those who face journeys through difficult territory
- Pray for celebrities who are in the public eye at the moment
- Give thanks to God for the joy and beauty of gardens and flowers

## Meditation

Let us worship the Lord our God in every way possible!  
Let us sing songs of faith and joy which lift our hearts in praise!  
Let us confess our faith with enthusiasm, confidence and love;  
Let us then confess sins with honest and heartfelt repentance;  
Let us hear the words of grace that say; 'Your sins are forgiven!'  
Let us read psalms together, with generations of the faithful;  
Let us pray in intercession, as we are bidden by Scripture;  
Let us sing great hymns of faith, and declare what we believe;  
Let us hear the Words of Scripture, Old Testament and New;  
Let us listen to a sermon, the prophetic Word of God for all;  
Let us share bread and wine in thanksgiving for our salvation;  
Let us bless each other with the grace, and bind ourselves in love.  
Let us never fail to meet with regularity and worship the Lord;  
Thanks be to God for the gift of worship!

## Bible Study - 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

<sup>6</sup> But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought us the good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always think kindly of us and that you long to see us just as we long to see you. <sup>7</sup> Therefore, fellow believers, in all our distress and affliction we were encouraged about you because of your faith. <sup>8</sup> For now we live, because you are standing firm in the Lord! <sup>9</sup> How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we feel in the presence of our God because of you? <sup>10</sup> Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and complete whatever is lacking in your faith.

## Review

It is quite extraordinary to read this passage having read yesterday about Paul's concerns for the church at Thessalonica. As we read through this letter, it seems that Timothy really did arrive in the middle of Paul's writing of this letter (having been sent earlier – see 3:5) bearing news about the church and assuring Paul that everything was well! The news confirmed that 'faith and love' (3:6) had indeed formed the basis of the church there, after so short a visit from Paul, and the rest of the passage positively glows with happiness, as Paul expresses his joy at knowing his efforts at Thessalonica were not 'in vain' (3:5).

### ***Infectious joy, and the unity of God's people***

We all know what it is like to receive news that makes us happy and glad, and it is quite normal for this to affect us positively, so that as a consequence, life in general feels good and better. This is certainly the case here, but the stakes are so much higher than we can easily appreciate. It is difficult to know exactly what Paul and others like him felt about the task in which they were involved, but around 50 AD onwards, the state of the church at Jerusalem was declining, eventually to be dispersed in 70 AD with the sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans. The future of God's church came to depend upon the house churches and congregations established by Paul and other evangelists, and each one was valuable. For Paul, the church at Thessalonica was valuable as part of the group of churches towards which he felt a responsibility, nurturing them as he did through teaching and through letters.

### ***The importance of staying together***

There were many churches founded throughout the Roman Empire in the early days of the Christian church. However, only the churches that stayed together and kept in touch with each other created the growing church of the second and third century and the basis of the future 'people of God' and church heritage by which the faith has been passed on to us. It was so important that these small congregations knew about each other, kept in contact, and kept closely to the apostolic faith. We cannot underestimate the importance of this, and we should not assume that it is any different today. Too many people think that they can just start churches and do what they judge best without taking account of Jesus' prayer that His disciples 'be one' (see John 17), and maintain contact both with other churches and also the historic standards of the 'apostolic faith', of which the Bible is our guide.

### ***The importance of faith that binds God's people together***

We are used to reading great theological explanations of faith in the letters of Paul; for example, Romans is an example of a letter that is a powerful explanation of faith from beginning to end, and Galatians also expresses faith in powerful ways. What we have here in this passage however, is Paul's use of the word 'faith' in a quite different way. Here, he does not explain faith, but uses the word to express happiness, joy, encouragement, confidence and hope (3:6,7,10). In each case, the word 'faith' is not a technical word but a genuine part of how he talks about life. He uses the word synonymously with 'believing in Jesus' (3:6), and it also expresses happiness, for in verse 6, the words 'good news' are not just a formula for the Gospel, they mean joy and happiness at news received. In verse 7, the word 'faith' clearly refers to belief in Jesus, but again, the whole sentence is emotive, and expresses great concern. In the last verse (3:10), Paul uses the word more technically, but his desire was that the Thessalonians grew in faith and he would see them again one day and share in the true fellowship of Jesus' grace. The fact that Paul uses the word 'faith' in this way helps us know that Paul was no 'grandstanding' preacher, speaking to people what he barely believed himself, or offering to others a view of Christ and the church that he did not maintain in his own life, speech and witness.

### ***Faith in Christ, through everything***

I find it hard when I talk to people at church and discover that people are uncomfortable talking about matters of faith, or expressing hope in Jesus in everyday conversation, perhaps even uncomfortable in speaking about prayer or their 'hopes' in Christ. In addition, I have seen reports written for church meetings with little reference to Jesus or to God; and when this is challenged, I have had the dismissive reply, 'why should God appear in a financial report?' Frankly, if God and His Son Jesus Christ are not a part of how we do everything in the church, and not just covered by saying a brief prayer before each meeting, then something is desperately wrong. The story line here in 1 Thessalonians is easy to follow, but the underlying theme of Christ's involvement in everything is a lesson to us all.

## **Questions** *(for use in groups)*

1. What personal faith in Christ is expressed within this passage? How does this differ from the technical description of faith found, for example, in Romans 3:21-26?
2. Is faith just a prop when things become difficult? Why do people believe this?
3. How are we connected to other Christians in the life of the church today?

## **Discipleship**

### **Personal comment:**

*I have been embarrassed on a number of occasions by speaking about the Lord to people who I thought were comfortable with this, only to find that they are not. I once spoke briefly about what Jesus meant to me in some personal situation to a 'big name' speaker come to address the crowds at the Bible College where I was a tutor. I was hosting him for the day, and was 'making conversation' and thought I spoke perfectly appropriately and in response to his own comments. My words about Jesus received a blank and quizzical stare from the great man, who, a few minutes later, proceeded to speak to the crowds with great eloquence about the things of God. I was just left feeling very puzzled by the whole experience.*

### **Ideas for discipleship programme**

- *Recall incidents in your recent life where you have felt like praising God for your faith and the wonderful things God has done for you. If you cannot think of such incidents, then ask the Lord what is happening in your spiritual life, and whether there is something wrong.*
- *Pray for those who are working across the boundaries of Christian churches and organisations to maintain the coherence of the 'Body of Christ', and if you cannot think of who this might be, ask around your church about who might fit this description. Others may be able to help!*

## **Final Prayer**

Thank You, Lord God, for the little things of life which make our day and give us security in what we do: the love of those who are close to us, the things we do each day for others, and what they do for us, the food we eat, the drinks we enjoy, and the conversations we share each day. May we never stop praising You for the little things that make life good.  
AMEN