

## Prayer

Almighty God, today is a day of light and not darkness, and we thank You for Your victory over darkness and death and the light of Your resurrection! May we live each day of our lives in Your light, may we take this light into the world to wherever there is darkness, and may we cherish Your light as it illuminates all our days. Thanks be to You, Almighty God, for Your eternal and life giving light, which we find in Jesus Christ our Lord: AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Whenever you eat, say a prayer that does two things; firstly to bless the food in God's name and secondly to give thanks for its provision. This is what is meant by the traditional 'grace', traditionally said over food by Christians.*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for North Africa and the Arab world:** *Pray for Arab countries as a whole and the nations of North Africa as they look with concern at what is happening around them*
- *Give thanks to God for water, and pray for the industrial companies that distribute this precious resource.*
- *Pray about the way that the media in your country is owned and managed. Pray that your news media will remain essentially independent*

## Meditation

Give me the gifts and graces I need, Lord Jesus,  
To be a faithful disciple of Yours in word and deed:

Help me to accept the limits of the life you have given me;  
To refrain from being jealous of the gifts of others;  
To hold my tongue when I am tempted to use it for hurt;  
To smile when I mean it, and not avoid it or fake it;  
To judge myself first, before I judge other people;  
To question my own motives first, before those of others;  
To conquer my anger before it flares and conquers me;  
To give attention to others, so they know they are heard;  
To seek the good of all humanity and foster hospitality  
To be a peacemaker, someone of mercy and love,

Grant me this prayer so that I may be more like You;  
Jesus Christ, my inspiration, my Lord and my God.

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## Bible passage - 2 Corinthians 1:8-14

<sup>8</sup> Friends, we do not want you to be unaware of the severe difficulties we had in Asia. We were so completely crushed under our burdens that we despaired even of life. <sup>9</sup> Indeed, it was as if we had received the sentence of death, and so had no confidence in ourselves but only in God who raises the dead! <sup>10</sup> He who has rescued us from such a deadly peril will continue to save us, and we have set our hope on Him for our future deliverance. <sup>11</sup> You should join us in our prayers, so that thanks be given to God on our behalf by many people for the favour given us through the prayers of many.

<sup>12</sup> Now this is our boast; the testimony of our conscience is that in the world, and even more so with you, we have behaved with pure motives and godly sincerity, and not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God. <sup>13</sup> For we do not write anything to you that you cannot read and also understand; I hope you will always understand completely <sup>14</sup> just as you have already

understood in part; that on the day of the Lord Jesus we may boast in you just as you may boast in us.

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## Bible Study

### Review

As soon as we read this part of Paul's letter, it is obvious that he was treading carefully and uncertain about how his letter would be received! For this reason, it is a little difficult to read and understand. At first, he writes about the difficulties of his evangelistic mission (1:8-10), and his hope that the Corinthians might join in prayer for this missionary effort (1:11). He also claims to be totally honest and godly in his dealings with everyone, not least the Corinthians (1:12). Again, he hoped that by being as plain as possible (1:13) the Corinthians would receive what he had to say, and be as happy with him as he was with them (1:14)

It is relatively easy to pick out some interesting bits. At first glance, the most powerful part of the passage seems to be Paul's conviction that all will be well despite horrendous difficulties, for God is a God who *'raises the dead'* (1:9). God has saved him in the past, and he is confident that God will go on doing this in the future and may be trusted completely. This is a powerful testimony, and it fits with everything we know about Paul's understanding of the nature of God. Throughout his letters, Paul writes about God as a God of love, who through the resurrection of Jesus, has broken down the barriers between heaven and earth so that sinners may be saved.

In the second half of the passage, Paul speaks of 'boasting', firstly in having pure motives (1:12) and secondly in describing his relationship with the Corinthians at the end of the passage (1:14). This use of the word 'boast' may seem odd to us, perhaps a little insincere. However, the word 'boast' was used in a particular way in Paul's day, and not just by him, by other evangelists as well. It was reckoned that the first person to preach the Gospel and found a church in any place could 'boast' of this work before the Throne of Grace, as the first fruits of the Gospel. So Paul was entitled to 'boast' of the Corinthian church, because he was the person who first preached there and founded its church (Acts 18:1f.).

For a number of reasons, Paul did not want to use the word 'boast' in this way. If we read through the letter of 2 Corinthians, we will find that he frequently speaks about 'boasting', and nearly always tried to change what his readers think about the word. Here in this passage, he says that his real boast is that he has always tried to be correct, honest and godly in his dealings with the Corinthians (1:12). So his defence against those who accused him of attacking the Corinthian church was that he did not want to 'boast' or tell them what to do. Rather, he wanted to be honest and set out what he believed 'on the table'. It was a point that the Corinthians could not have missed.

Paul writes about 'boasting' elsewhere in 2 Corinthians, but he always stands back from making claims of authority over the church. For example, Paul urged those who accused him of 'boasting' about their church to forget about this and *'boast only in the Lord'* (10:17). He was desperately concerned that his letter was read more as an invitation to get things right between brothers and sisters in the Lord than an authoritative injunction telling them what they should do. It is wise if we remember this when reading the letter today!

Once we have understood all this, we can perhaps appreciate the treasures here in this passage. The most dramatic of these is Paul's description of the difficulties of the apostolic missionary task (1:8-10). Perhaps we do not think of the work of missionaries as dangerous today. Certainly, Paul wanted the Corinthians, and through them everyone else, to know that he had risked his life on mission for the sake of the Gospel. Verse 9 says that Paul felt under a 'sentence of death', and this would certainly be an extreme pressure. He was not speaking about having his life threatened or being sentenced in court, although these things undoubtedly happened. He spoke more by way of reflecting on the fact that his life was not just given to the Gospel, it was truly endangered by the work. Of course, he trusted God completely for his safety, and Paul felt that he only survived because of God's protection through the prayers of many people who were supporting him. He therefore invited the Corinthians, as a church founded through his ministry, to join in with these prayers (1:11).

All in all, this passage sets us up for what lies ahead in this letter. Paul clearly attempts to speak to the heart of the Corinthians with whom he had a difficult relationship. Yet in the midst of trying to repair this relationship, he finds himself saying some revealing and sometimes dramatic things about faith, his own missions, and the life of the early Christian church.

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## Discipleship

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

1. What do you think that Paul means when he speaks about 'boasting' in this passage?
2. In your group, what do you know about the difficulties of mission in the first century? Which other Gospel and New Testament writers describe difficulties in the life of the early church, and what are they?
3. What perils do Christians face today for their faith, and what perils await those who try to take the Gospel to the whole world?

### **Personal comments by author**

*Many of the great New Testament letters are written for specific reasons, but as the writer goes about his task, greater truths are revealed. So it is in our lives. We travel onwards day by day, and as we do so, the great blessings of God are demonstrated as we continue. The great danger for any Christian is to stop the spiritual journey. If this happens, our lives will not show or demonstrate godliness. I am certainly aware that I could stop writing this website at any time; but by continuing, the Lord is able to use the words I write in ways that are quite beyond my understanding.*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Explore how your church began, and the spiritual values upon which your church was founded. Are these things reflected in the way you worship and preach the Gospel in word and deed today?*
- *Reflect on the word 'boast'. What things do Christians boast about today, and is this a relevant way of talking about how Christians should behave?*

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## Final Prayer

Thank You, Jesus Christ my Lord and Saviour, for the godly heritage that has been passed down to me. I praise You for all the people who have brought me the Gospel, for there are many of them. I praise You for all the people who see it as their call to preach the Gospel on the edges of church and society today, so that Your Kingdom is extended. May I fulfil my role in passing on the great treasure of the Gospel according to Your great will and plan, Jesus Christ my Saviour. AMEN

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