

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for the precious gift of this day. Lead us, we pray, through its joys and its troubles, and may we continue to praise You throughout the whole day. May we grow stronger in faith as we learn more about how to deal in a loving and godly way with the many different things that happen to us. We praise You, Lord Jesus Christ: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Hope

It may seem strange to suggest 'hope' as a subject for prayer. However, hope has been lost in so many situations, yet Christ can show the way. Pray for one that you know about.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for victims of rape, and for justice for the abused*
- *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*

Meditation

Come, my friend, and worship the Lord:

For He will accept you just as you are.

Bring your life and confess all your sins:

For the Lord will hear your heart and forgive.

Bring your hopes and your precious dreams:

For the Lord will fulfil His purposes in You.

Bring your songs and be released in praise:

For the Lord will be glorified in His heaven.

Bring your ears to attend to His Word:

For the Lord will lead You into all truth.

Bring your prayers for yourself and for others:

For the Lord will give you His answers in love.

Bring your desire to follow in His ways:

For the Lord will bless each step you take.

Go, my friend, having worshipped the Lord:

For He will be with you wherever you go.

Bible Study - 1 Thessalonians 2:9-12

⁹ You remember, fellow believers, our hard work and hardship, working day and night so that we might not become a burden to any of you while we proclaimed the Gospel of God to you. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and so is God, that to you who became believers, we were devout, righteous, and blameless. ¹¹ As you know, we dealt with each one of you as a father would with his children, ¹² urging and encouraging you and appealing to you to lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Review

On a number of occasions I have had the privilege of preaching evangelistically and then seeing a considerable number of people respond to an appeal to receive Christ. It is a profoundly moving thing to see. I mention this because the way that people respond to such circumstances and the dynamic of what happens at these critical moments is exactly what Paul is speaking about here in this passage. Paul had come but briefly to Thessalonica and the short period of time he had to evangelise was important, yielding a valuable harvest for the Kingdom. However, Paul knew that the interaction between his small party of missionaries and the newly converted Thessalonians was critical for the long term success of his 'church-planting'.

Hard work – what does it mean? Several issues were significant in what happened, as Paul indicates here. Firstly, Paul and his friends Silas and Timothy had both 'worked hard' and also 'endured hardship' in the few weeks they were in Thessalonica; but what does this mean? It would be natural for us to think that Paul was speaking about the hard work of declaring the Gospel and the hardship of being persecuted; and there is more than a hint of such 'hardship' in the report we find in Acts 17:1-9. I suspect that this was not what Paul was talking about here however, because he used this phrase; 'so that we might not become a burden to any of you while we proclaimed the Gospel of God to you.' The scenario was this. Paul and his friends had come to the city and immediately found some Jews who were prepared to 'put them up'. As a proper and polite thing to do, they did not presume upon their hospitality, but sought to 'pay their way', either by offering some service within the household or by working at their trade (tent-making – see Acts 18:3) and selling their skills in the local market-places. Such activity would be hard work for an 'outsider' in the chaotic trading conditions of the Roman Empire, but Paul knew that doing this was important for the success of the mission.

Integrity in evangelism Why should Paul's physical work and that of his companions affect the Gospel? If we think about it, the answers to this are relatively obvious. Surely, they would not have had a good hearing if word went around that they were taking advantage of hospitality in order to manipulate people into their own religious 'sect'! No, said Paul, he worked hard for himself and took advantage of no-one; moreover, he was confident that those who received him would say the same (2:9,10). How easy it would have been to make their hosts feel obliged to respond to their message in order to keep everyone happy. In addition, Paul could have presented himself as the great preacher, who deserved a comfortable bed, clean clothes and the best food and hospitality! But no, Paul felt that no one who became a believer would be able to accuse him of pretentious behaviour (2:10); he did not present himself as a preaching 'prima donna'! Relationships at Thessalonica had been amicable, and genuinely caring (as we also saw yesterday, 2:1-8). The appeal of the Gospel was presented urgently but with proper sensitivity.

The good and the bad example In this passage, Paul confirmed yet again that the Gospel spread when people were respected, and dealt with respectfully and in all honesty. It is not too hard for us to observe that a shallow harvest is reaped when people are manipulated into faith, especially if the one who delivers the message is presented as superior to others. Fortunately, I have witnessed some who act with integrity like Paul as Scripture advises, seeking to give their full attention to those to whom they have preached, spending hours talking and counselling, to the detriment of their own interests and often their sleep! Unfortunately, it is sometimes true that those who conduct missions present the evangelist as someone who is not accessible to those to whom they preach, as one who walks on another planet and carefully avoids all contact with others. They tell other people to counsel and do the work of 'harvesting' whilst they have a rest somewhere comfortable!

All circumstances can be misunderstood, of course, but the truth is that we all perceive honesty and integrity if it can be found within the people we have met. Paul was confident that he could not be accused of acting with anything less than the highest standards of Christian fellowship and personal human conduct; as the presentation of the Gospel always requires.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss the different evangelists you have seen or heard. From your observation, do they measure up to Paul's standards here?
2. What part does honesty and integrity play in the communication of the Gospel?
3. How important are 'mentors' in Christian faith; Christians who are older in the faith and can assist those who are growing in faith?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

There are a number of issues we might take up within this passage of Scripture, however, it seems to me that personal integrity in the proclamation of the Gospel is of great importance, particularly when we seek a response to the preached Word. The church is wrong to copy the culture of celebrity found in the world, and when our leaders, preachers and evangelists employ the techniques and styles of celebrity, then the nature of the Gospel is compromised. This is not a comment so much about method, but the attitudes, manner, bearing and personal conduct of leaders. The Lord looks for honest Christians who will do the hard work of the Kingdom; he does not look for celebrities who are trying to make a good living from the Gospel.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *How can the Gospel be shared today in ways that demonstrate integrity, and how can we promote forms of evangelism that avoid the charge of being 'elitist' or of 'spiritual arrogance'?*
- *Pray for all those who seek to spread the Gospel through evangelism, and ask the Lord to help you understand how you can share your faith in ways that are appropriate to the people you meet.*

Final Prayer

Keep me honest, Lord God, I pray. Show me how to live in a way that reflects truth and integrity before others; not so that I might claim any virtue myself, but so that I might demonstrate the benefits of doing what is right according to Your will. I ask this in Jesus' name, AMEN