

## Prayer

Powerful and generous Lord, come into our lives to deal with the problems that beset us. Expose the Devil's grip wherever it has taken hold, break the bondages that have held us back from doing what is right, and liberate us into the light and blessing of the Holy Spirit You have given us. We praise and worship You, Lord God, for You are our Deliverer! ALLELUIA!

## Prayer Suggestions

*(Offering alternatives that can broaden your experience of prayer)*

### Prayer ideas

*Do your best to find different things to pray about today. After you have said your normal prayers, wait on the Lord for His prompting. Wait as long as you can, for His ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts greater than our thoughts.*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for the stability of the world.** *Pray that God will work amongst His people to speak to the world in our own age. Pray that the message of the Gospel will help to save many people in this world and make it a safer place while it still exists.*
- *Give thanks to God for your friends and for the many ways they bless you*
- *Pray for the many people in this world who will today suffer some injury that will change their lives. Pray for those who help such people, in hospitals and churches and other charitable organisations*

## Meditation

The Word of God is a mystery,  
But we all may read or hear it;

The Word of God is a 'means of grace',  
By which we may all be saved;

The Word of God is a brilliant light,  
Which is focussed on God's pathway;

The Word of God is a unique signpost,  
Showing only one way to heaven;

The Word of God is a river of life,  
Flowing out into the sea of eternity;

The Word of God is a place of safety,  
Where all can find true peace;

The Word of God is a stirring challenge,  
Which demands a response from all;

The Word of God is ever with us,  
Written in the Bible and our hearts.

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## Bible passage - Hebrews 4:12-16

<sup>12</sup> For the Word of God is vigorous and full of life; sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to divide soul from spirit, and joints from marrow, discerning the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. <sup>13</sup> There is nothing created which is hidden from Him, and all are exposed and laid bare to the eyes of the One to whom we must account.

<sup>14</sup> Since we have a great High Priest who has passed over to the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathise with our limitations, but we have One who has been tested in every way like ourselves; and yet is without sin. <sup>16</sup> Therefore let us come near to the Throne of Grace with confidence, to receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

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## Bible Study

### Review

There are those in every generation who struggle to get out of their heritage to enter into the full experience of Christ. The writer of Hebrews was deeply concerned about Jews who had such difficulties, and most of this part of Hebrews appeals to them to make the jump. Yesterday, we read an appeal for Jews to accept salvation that used the idea of God's eternal 'rest', or 'Sabbath' (4:6-11). Today, Hebrews sets out a further truth; God knows all things and nothing is hidden from Him (4:12-13), and the saving work of Christ is complete (4:14,15). Therefore no one is unable to receive God's salvation; His mercy and grace are freely offered (4:16).

Without a shadow of a doubt, this is one Hebrews' memorable texts. The message may be plain enough, but the illustrations used and the language employed is dramatic, for the author was not playing with religion, he was claiming the truth and the stakes could not have been higher. To begin with, God's awesome omniscience (His all-knowing) is likened to the penetrating 'Word of God', which is itself compared dramatically to a 'two-edged sword' (4:12,13). Then, after a stunning account of the perfection and sufficiency of Christ's ministry (4:14,15), the writer sums up his thoughts with an appeal to come near to God's throne to receive His mercy and grace. In the face of such penetrating truth, surely no one can stand back!

Verse 12 contains the well known words, '*for the Word of God is vigorous and full of life; sharper than any two edged sword ...*' (4:12). This verse reminds us of the famous Biblical text describing the 'whole armour of God' (Eph. 6:13-17); there, the 'Word of God' is likened to the 'Sword of the Spirit' (Eph 6:17). Traditionally, the sword is the sharp instrument of God's judgement by warfare (see Judges 3:16, Psalm 149:6), so it is not surprising that here in Hebrews we find that it exposes people's thoughts before God. To understand what the author is saying we must remember that the 'soul' is the human being as created by God, and the 'spirit' is the divine within the soul (see Genesis 2:7). Our passage therefore says that if we do not know the difference between the human and the divine, then the Word of God surely does! It reveals the eternal truth of salvation that is not necessarily evident to the human soul.

But we must read carefully because the Word of God is not merely likened to a sword; it is described in two ways; '*full of life*' and '*sharper than any two-edged sword*'. Together, this tells us that God is actively and vigorously involved in the affairs of the world. Now in the first century, most Jews believed that God had not been doing anything in Israel since the days of the prophets, so if they were to accept Jesus as Messiah, then they had to put aside such ideas. Today we have a similar problem in the church, for some Christians feel that the lack of wholesale 'revival' today means that we must now pray for God to begin to 'do something' in His world! How extraordinary! This scripture instructs us that God is always active and doing vigorously what He wants; if we do not see this it is our problem not His!

The powerful description of Jesus' work in verses 14 to 16 tells us what God was doing in the first century, and he continues to do this today. Jesus is our effective 'High Priest', opening up the throne room of God's grace and mercy (4:14,15)! The point about Jesus knowing our weaknesses is made memorably, but this is a theme found throughout Hebrews (2:14-18, 5:5f. etc) and it stands at the heart of what the letter says about the work of Jesus. The point here is this; the work of Jesus, who is Himself the 'Word of God' (we must not think this term only refers to the Bible), judges and exposes the heart of humanity and opens God's grace and mercy (4:16). Surely, no one who claims to have any interest in God can put aside an invitation to come into His presence?

In the first century, many Jews cautiously stood back from the full Gospel, so Hebrews addressed their problems, presenting an open invitation to receive salvation. God now uses the letter to the Hebrews to remind us of the force and power with which God is at work even in our own generation. We would be foolish to ignore this or imagine it is of no consequence, for our task is always to join in!

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## Discipleship

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

1. What is your understanding of the difference between the terms 'soul' and 'spirit'. Has this study helped or hindered your understanding of his?
2. There is a great deal within this passage of Scripture. In your group, discuss those parts of it which you feel most speak to you.
3. Does it help you to speak of Jesus as your great 'High Priest'? In what ways?

### **Personal comments by author**

*We must all account for what we have done before God. This is a very sobering thought, and one which is worth keeping in the back of our minds throughout everything we do. Yet true peace with God is found when we no longer feel this to be a pressure because of the confidence we have in Jesus Christ due to our salvation. For me, one of those great moments of peace came when I realise the difference between my soul and my spirit, because I realise at that moment that the person I am (my soul) has been created by the breathe of God within me (my spirit). I am dependent upon God, and however much I try to go my own way, my spirit wants to do God's will.*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- **Something to work at:** *It may be that there are times when you feel confident in your faith. There may also be times when you are not so sure about what you believe. If this is the case, spare no effort to try and get to the bottom of what holds you back. If it is rooted in some sin that needs to be sorted out, then come before the Lord and allow Him to help you.*
- **Something to pray about:** *Pray for people you know who are full of faith and yet suffer sometimes in quite difficult ways. Pray for their blessing and the relief of their suffering.*

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## Final Prayer

Merciful Lord, when life rushes past so quickly, keep us alert to the possibilities of love, of hope, of faith and of joy. Be present with us by Your Spirit so that we do not forget the blessings and the privileges we enjoy. Thank you Lord, AMEN

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