

Prayer

Almighty God and Creator of all; restore my fallen soul
Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth; heal my worn body
Holy Spirit, breath of God, comfort my aching heart
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to You
Almighty God, Lord Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit ... AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Pastors

Pray for those who have the spiritual job of giving you spiritual and pastoral guidance and counsel. Pray for their strength and health and protection from the works of Satan.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who suffer due to the world economic crisis*
- *Pray for the nation of China*
- *Praise God for the joys of family life and the bonds of love*

Meditation

It was early in the morning when I realised the sign.
A feeling of uncertainty came over me,
and then I heard a voice;
A clear voice within my conscious mind which said
'PRAY'.

I did not need to hear this word again
for I knew exactly what it meant;
God did not have some great thing for me to do,
a 'message from on high' to share at church,
(and become the centre of attention.)

No. The Lord needed me to pray right then,
and in so doing, be obedient;
I knew within my heart the prayers that needed to be said;
so I said them.

Dear Jesus, help me hear that voice
whenever it speaks again, and do Your will.

Bible Study - Ephesians 5:15-20

¹⁵ Be carefully then how you live your life, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making good use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is; ¹⁸ do not get drunk with wine, for that is reckless indulgence, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ sharing with one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and praising the Lord with all your heart, ²⁰ always giving thanks for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

Review

This is sound advice from Paul about living the Christian life, and it stands as a powerful testimony to the work of the Spirit in the life of Paul and the Christian church of the earliest times. Their love and care for one another and their praise of God were so powerful that countless numbers of people were attracted to Christ, making the church grow substantially in the midst of the Roman Empire. There is no doubt that throughout history people by nature have been attracted to individuals and groups who exhibit happiness and joy, and this attraction is even more powerful at times of trouble or distress in society. Paul's advice here is realistic and considered, but his overwhelming conclusion is that if we live according to God's will for us and are filled with the Spirit of God, we will outwardly demonstrate a joy which shows itself in the delight of worshipping Almighty God!

Paul tells us here that the way we live counts for a great deal, because what we do and how we do it is seen by others and they make judgements based on what they see of us and the Faith we publicly confess. For good reason, each of us must 'be careful' about how we 'live' (5:15), and when Paul describes this as 'wise', we should anticipate a classic scriptural contrast between two possibilities; one of which is an example of life which does not work and the other is an example of Christian living which does work (5:18 and 5:19,20). The demonstration of true Christian life and faith is important, says Paul, because 'the days are evil', meaning that he expected the Lord to come in glory at any time. For Paul, there was no time to lose in showing the world the benefits of living as the people of God, and his message is as important today as it was when he wrote it because despite the passing of two thousand years, the Lord is just as close, and just as likely to come again soon.

Firstly, Paul implored his readers not to be foolish in drinking wine to get drunk (5:18). Some translations describe getting drunk as 'debauchery', but I am not sure that this is a word which is either used or understood. Dictionaries tell us that it is 'the perversion of what is right' and 'reckless sensuality'. What Paul wants us to understand is that getting drunk shows a casual approach both to the self discipline necessary for godly living but also a desire for the sensual pleasure of getting drunk that is contrary to God's will for us. The Lord has far greater pleasures for us than getting drunk! This is not just a casual reference to the perils of drinking; it is a powerful and real example of how a godly life can be hauled away from the Lord by Satan. There have been too many examples of this within the life of the church for us to be complacent about it.

In complete contrast to drunkenness, Paul implores his fellow Christians to be filled with the Spirit instead! (5:18) This is a different sensual experience, and if you have allowed yourself to be taken over by God's spirit in wonder, love and praise, you will know that this is a far more pleasurable experience than getting drunk and it comes with no 'hang-over'! Paul's advice is to share with one another in 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs'. This is not just a liturgical instruction about hymnody, psalms and songs in worship, but Paul's encouragement of all God's people to sing and share in joyous praise, not gathered around alcohol but around the Lord Himself who gives us so much more! Is it not true that people will often happily relinquish their inhibitions when sharing over a bottle of wine or other alcohol? So why should we not 'let ourselves go' in the mercy and protection of the Lord, to praise Him and give Him glory and thanks!

I am certain that if God's people were to become known as people who enjoyed a good time together in worship and praise, and their lives demonstrated the joy and happiness of the presence, comfort and guidance of the Holy Spirit, then we would have no problems with evangelism or church growth! As Paul says quite clearly in this passage, it is wise to be joyful and happy! Why then do so many Christians think that a right approach to the life of faith is to be very serious and relatively quiet? That is not the advice of scripture!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group why it is that many people who are Christians still drink too much. What can be the results of this excess?
2. What difference does happiness make to worship? If people are sad for whatever reason, why do some regard joy as a threat?
3. Do you enjoy singing Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs? What is the difference between these three?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This is a message which I feel I must take to heart. I am not sure that I have been as 'joyous' in life as I ought to be given the benefits of my salvation. It is only possible to make moves towards expressing joy as a Christian if you submit yourself to the Holy Spirit, and allow Him to direct what you are doing. Let yourself go in Him and He will bring you joy!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Do your best when attending worship to enter in to it with joy. Joy is infectious, and it will help other people to find true happiness if you radiate joy and peace with God through Christ!*
- *Write a note in your diary at the end of each day which indicates whether you have been happy or joyful during the day. Some days you will be, and some days you will not. See what pattern emerges.*

Final Prayer

Holy Spirit, we are amazed at Your mysterious ways. Yet you guide us along the path of life with power and grace, enabling us to fulfil our lives through the gracious gifts You bestow. All praise to You, Living Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN