

God be in my head <https://youtu.be/8MIT53inUtA>

Let us pray:

Great and Wonderful God,
we bring you once more our worship.
We join with the great company of your people
on earth and in heaven,
to sing of your majesty,
to marvel at your love
and to rejoice at your goodness.

Lord Jesus Christ,
we know we are less than perfect,
our faith weak,
our love poor,
our motives mixed,
our commitment unpredictable,
but, despite our many weaknesses,
we want so much to serve you,
to live as the people you would have us be.
Forgive what we have been and direct what we shall be.

Holy Spirit,
take what we say and do,
with all its blemishes,
and use it to bring a little light
into the darkness of our world.
Through your grace,
work through us to share your love
and make your goodness known.

To the glory of your name, Amen.

Read, sing or listen to: Empty, broken, here I stand. <https://youtu.be/72204B7fgqU> StF 421

Prayers for others:

Loving God,
you have promised that those who mourn shall be comforted.
So now we pray for all those facing sorrow at this time.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those whose hopes have been dashed -
their plans laid waste,
their dreams destroyed.
Rekindle their faith in the future.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those wrestling with depression -
those for whom life seems empty
and the future dark.
Show them light at the end of the tunnel'

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are unwell -
afflicted by chronic disease,
suffering from terminal illness.
Support them through all that they face.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Loving God,
hold on to all who walk through the valley of tears.
Reach out to them,
and grant them the knowledge that you are with them,
sharing their pain and moved by their sorrow.
Minister the consolation that you alone can offer,
and give them the assurance
that those who mourn shall be comforted;
those who weep will laugh.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Read: 1 Samuel 3: 1-20

Read, sing or listen to: I, the Lord of sea and sky <https://youtu.be/KQh477hpiPU>

Read: 2 Corinthians 4: 5-12

Treasure in Jars of Clay

What can Paul be meaning when he writes in this part of the letter to the church at Corinth – “but we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not us”?

Paul is writing to the leaders of a church he founded on a visit to Corinth, but one from which he has heard increasingly about their problems – their quarrelling, infighting and false teaching.

We might think, looking back on the remarkable spread of the Early Church, that everything was easy and straightforward for them. The two letters from Corinth (possibly a confabulation of 4 or 5 letters) show clearly this is not the case. They were very bad.

But also, very fruitful – Corinth was the fourth largest city in Roman Empire and Paul's work among the thieves, drunkards, playboys, and prostitutes there had founded a church whose believers reached other cities too.

The fact that the Corinthian church was so bad and yet so fruitful shows us how much they were receivers of God's grace. So perhaps this is the point Paul is making here.

In his knowledge of the Old Testament (as we call it) scriptures – Paul would have remembered the reference to clay in the tale of Job (4:19) where the speaker talks about our inability to understand the ways of God because we “live in homes of clay and lives of dust”. How imperfect we are compared to God and yet we often act as if our future was in our own hands. Isaiah 64:8 continues this thread saying, “You are the potter, we are the clay” We are the work of God's hands.

I think it is even more likely that Paul was thinking of another Scripture reference from Judges – the account of Gideon defeating the Midianites. Especially as the verse preceding that of “this treasure in jars of clay” talks about light.

Two kinds of light – the light which overcame darkness when God spoke at the dawn of creation. And the light of the Glory of Christ – the good news.

In Judges 7:2 and following verses we hear how Gideon is given very specific instructions as to how to defeat the enemy. Not only will the Israelites not carry any weapons in their hands, but they will also only send a small number against a vast army. They were to take torches hidden inside clay jars – so that the enemy should not be alerted too soon. Then, at Gideon's signal, smash the jars, take the torch in the left hand and their trumpet in the right...and they routed the enemy!

God said quite clearly before they set out that the reason for sending so few against the enemy was so that God would be glorified – so that the soldiers of Israel could not boast in their own strength – and that all who saw the battle would see that God had given them the victory.

Paul is aware that the leaders of the Corinthian church feel themselves to have accomplished everything in their own strength. They saw themselves as “Super-apostles” as opposed to Paul who they disregarded.

In referring to the Glory of God at the beginning of time Paul is showing them and us that God has already won the battle of Good over evil, light over darkness. He continues to talk of the Glory of Christ who conquers death once and for all.

God does not need our strength to accomplish his mission – he needs our weakness. No-one should look at us and see a great army marching across the land defeating evil by sheer weight of numbers. In our weakness we must rely solely on God, as Samuel did.

Our prayer time, our work for the day-to-day maintenance of the body of Christ, should all be about hearing the call of God. Samuel – young, small, inexperienced is called to give the toughest of messages to Eli – a word of condemnation from God about his sons and his own inaction in dealing with them.

We are called in the same way – to be a light that shows when we are broken. To be treasure that is often overlooked by the powers of this world because it is in jars of clay. Paul is referring to the Good news hidden inside frail and mortal bodies that will have to undergo times of pain and suffering for the sake of the Kingdom.

But is it possible that God is looking at the church in the same way? That we have made our ‘bricks and mortar’ into a container for the faith, hiding it away? Is now the time to smash open the container and reveal the light? To take on the task of moving across our communities with only the grace of God as our strength?

Read, sing or listen to: In Christ alone <https://youtu.be/ouGuG97l2RY> StF 351

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, and all those for whom we pray,
evermore. Amen.**

All prayers from Prayers for All Seasons Book 2 by Nick Fawcett