

## Prayer

Lord God Almighty, You have blessed the world with joy, and given it the fullest expression of this happiness in the liberation of the soul through Your son Jesus and the great victory of His resurrection. Give us true resurrection joy each and every day of our lives, so that we may never miss the blessings you have given us through our doubt, our trials or our suffering. Lift up our hearts, we pray, to sing Your praise! Alleluia! AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Barak Obama

*Pray today for the new President of the USA as he continues to embark upon his term of office and establish routines of working to serve those who have elected him.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for those going in to hospital for an operation or treatment*
- *Give thanks for food and drink and the sharing of it together*
- *Pray for those people of the world who are poorly governed*

## Meditation

It's not just philosophers who ponder 'who am I'?  
No, for you and I still wonder why we live.  
It's not enough to talk of flesh and blood,  
Of brains and thoughts, intelligence and feeling.  
Of life's experience from our youth 'till when we die,  
And say 'that's it, that's me!'

This cannot tell me why I'm conscious of 'myself',  
Or why I do the many things I do;  
Or why I feel the touch of God,  
His Spirit, leading on, despite my self  
And making deep within my soul, a heart  
To serve my God and love all those around me?

But now I know; once touched by universal truth,  
Twice born in the Creator's breath,  
All else is mere description and experience  
Except the Spirit's gracious gifts  
By which the re-created 'me' is brought to life  
And everything is perfected in faith and hope and love.

## Bible Study - Genesis 3:8-13

<sup>8</sup> *The man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden within the breeze of the day, and they hid themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.* <sup>9</sup> *But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'* <sup>10</sup> *He said, 'I heard Your sound in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.'*

<sup>11</sup> He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree from which I forbade you to eat?' <sup>12</sup> The man replied, 'The woman You put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate.' <sup>13</sup> Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'

## Review

What an incredible tragedy. Once the woman and the man had succumbed to the serpent's temptations, their world fell apart, and the beautiful relationship God had given them was immediately compromised. Blame and shame cascaded from the words of them both as they responded to God's pained enquiries about their 'fallen' state. The damage had been done through both the serpent's words of temptation and the frailty of the man and the woman (3:17). Moreover, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil had been eaten, and the pair had now lost their innocent relationship with the creator, and by choice, they opened themselves up to all the possibilities of sin and evil in the world. But that did not mean that God did not still love them.

**The consequences of the Fall** The story of 'the Fall' began in yesterday's reading, and what we know from this part of the story is the anatomy of temptation and sin, and how it afflicts humanity. But the rest of this chapter of Genesis now describes to us in graphic terms what the consequences of this fall will be, and there are three main parts to this. Firstly scripture describes the loss of unity between all the parties; God, the woman and the man, and the rest of Creation including animals (as described in today's passage). Secondly, God announces the consequences of the fall on the three main participants in the story; on the serpent, on the woman and on the man (2:14-19). Thirdly, God confirms His justice and His mercy by both turning the man and the woman out of the Garden He had made but also demonstrating His intimate care for the two of them (2:20-24).

**The importance of Genesis** If you were to ask people 'what is sin?' and ask them to find a Biblical answer, you might expect that they would turn to the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1ff, Deut 5:6ff). If you were to ask what sin does to people and how it can be dealt with, you might suggest that sin separates us from God and Christ came to mend that separation. You would not be wrong, of course, but if you were to spend time with Genesis 3 instead of the Ten Commandments, you would come closer to the true answers to these questions. This is because this part of scripture is specifically designed to be a 'prologue' to our understanding of the whole of human history, and events such as the giving of the Ten Commandments happened in a social context that colours the essential truths we find there. Genesis 3 describes the heart of God and the hearts of all men and women, and it makes substantial comment on the roots of sin and its consequences.

**The breakdown, selfishness, and God's response** We cannot read this passage without noticing that God, the director of His creation and sole authority within it, has become sidelined from humanity by the presumptions of sin. The serpent introduced temptation through innuendo and misinformation (3:1-7) and the woman and the man fell for it, so they could no longer stand within the sight of God. They had chosen their own way, not His, and their hiding (3:8) represents this tragic breakdown; the wonderful delight of Genesis 1:27,28; 2:7 and 2:21-24 were lost in an instant of self-centredness. God was forced to act like a judge appealing for the truth, calling out to the man and the woman 'where are you?' (3:9), a cry that has echoed throughout history ever since. The man and the woman were unable to respond with anything more than embarrassed self justification, made all the worse by their pathetic accusations made against each other and the serpent (3:11-13). The rights and wrongs of what was said, like most human arguments, was irrelevant. Truth was no longer their objective, only self preservation, and a heartbroken

God was left to decide how to deal with the awfulness of the situation whilst watching his own loved and created 'image' descend into bickering.

This a heartbreaking passage of scripture, but the truth is that by accepting this scriptural analysis of sin and evil, we begin God's pathway to overcoming the Fall, and its effects upon the whole of the world, all human history, and all people.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Make a list of the failings of the man in the story of 'the Fall'. How seriously do you rate these, and how does Christ deal with them?
2. Make a list of the failings of the woman in the story of 'the Fall'. How seriously do you rate these, and how does Christ deal with them?
3. Discuss the feelings of God in the scenario of this passage of scripture. Indeed, is it possible to imagine how God 'feels'?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*This passage together with the Ten Commandments and Jesus' teaching in 'Sermon on the Mount' are arguably the three most powerful expositions of the human condition of sin in the Bible. There is no point in trying to point the finger when looking at these issues. All humanity is exposed, and we must each examine ourselves knowing that the only way to deal with the barriers between God and ourselves is through Jesus. We may well have experienced personal conversion, but the path of Christian discipleship is one in which we constantly hand over our human nature to God, in complete submission, for His judgement. This pathway will bring us liberty and freedom beyond our comprehension!*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- Ask yourself about what excuses you use when replying to God's challenges. Each of us has stood back from something the Lord has asked of us, and our negative responses can be predictable. Ask the Lord to help you break any grip of negativity in your life and open to door to God's possibilities.
- Read a newspaper and see if you can find within it some modern day examples of ancient sins reflected in the Genesis 3 story, the evasion of personal responsibility, unfounded accusations, alienation, and more. Let scripture help you see the world around you in a different light.

## Final Prayer

Make me always ready, Great Lord of All, to love as I am loved, to serve as I am served, to give as I have received, and to help as I have been helped. Make me always ready to show through what I do the thanks I owe to You, my Lord, for saving me. AMEN