

## Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ; thank You for Your gifts:  
We praise You for the gift of life and the energy to enjoy it;  
We praise You for the gift of love and the people to share it;  
We praise You for the gift of faith and the time to exercise it;  
We praise You for the gift of hope and the light to live by it;  
We praise You for the gift of salvation and the grace to receive it;  
Lord Jesus Christ; thank You for being.

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Prayer Ministry

*There are many courses available to help God's people train in ministry to others through prayer. Pray for those who are learning and those teaching on such course today.*

### On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the technology you use in your home
- Pray for the elderly who mourn the loss of friends
- Pray for those who are designing the technology of the future

## Meditation

Why do some who have authority like to wield it,  
When those who truly have it use it sparingly?

Why do some who lead think words will get things done  
When those who achieve the most speak little?

Why do some like to take authority to themselves,  
When the only true authority is given by God?

Why do some think that they are above all criticism,  
When truth alone resides within the heart of God?

Why do some who lead insist they know God's will,  
When Jesus said 'the first will be last', and meant it?

Why do some people try to be God, instead of like Him?  
Do they want to be crucified? It won't happen again!

## Bible Study - Genesis 2:1-4a

<sup>1</sup> Then the whole work of the heavens and the earth was finished. <sup>2</sup> Since God finished the work that He had been doing on the seventh day, He rested on that day from all His work. <sup>3</sup> So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creation He had done.

<sup>4</sup> This is the record of when the heavens and the earth were created.

## Review

These incredibly powerful and awesome verses conclude the opening story of Creation in the Bible. The famous seventh and last day is described without any of the formal

statements used by God during the other six days of Creation; 'and God said', or 'evening came and morning came, the ... day', and yet the whole story is completed with immense creativity power. This time, however, God's power is evident not in the doing of things, but in the wisdom, control and discernment of when to stop work. God, who had been at work for six days, announced that all was finished and He would now rest. The seventh and last day of Creation was used for the inner creativity of rest, and God pronounced the day 'blessed' and 'holy' (2:3). It has now become for us a day not just of rest and the absence of work, but a day of remembrance of God's creative power

**The word 'Sabbath'** Interestingly, the word 'Sabbath' is not used here in this text, though the text teases us about this because the two Hebrew words closest to 'Sabbath' are 'shebi'i' (meaning 'seven') and 'shabat' (meaning 'finished') both appear close together in verse 2. No-one who read the text in ancient times would have been in any doubt about what this meant; it was God's instruction to honour Him by 'finishing' work on the 'seventh' day. The Sabbath, as it came to be known, was unique to Jewish life and the word 'Sabbath' combined the idea of 'seventh' and 'finished'. Although many cultures divided up seven days into a week, it was only the Jewish people who ceased to work on the seventh day, connecting it with God's blessing, and the idea of 'holiness' (2:3).

**Blessing and holiness** God's blessing, however, is different from being 'holy' (2:3). Despite the wonder of everything made in the first six days, nothing created was called 'holy', not even men and women who were made in God's 'image' (1:27). Holiness, of course, describes what is different between God and the rest of his creation, and holiness is part of God's divine nature. So this is the first time in the Bible that God defines something as 'holy'. We might expect that the first thing designated as 'holy' might be some object like a temple, or the city of Jerusalem (Zion), or perhaps even the Ark of the Covenant or the Tent of the Tabernacle in which it was kept. However, God declared in his passage that the holiness of His nature and presence was to be found primarily within a period of time, not a place, a day that was later called the 'Sabbath'. Although the Sabbath is instituted as God's rest as an example to all humanity, and blessed so that we know its special nature, the keeping of the Sabbath as a formal day of rest was only commanded in fourth of the 'Ten Commandments' (Ex 20:8-10) given through Moses after the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt. The Commandments were given not because any of them were new, of course, but because they established the moral principles written in to the very nature of a creation that was essentially 'good'.

**When did God stop work?** Although it may seem obvious to you on a first reading, there are two small points of interest in this passage which are often missed. Firstly, it is not really clear whether God stopped working 'on' the seventh day or 'before' it, thus leaving the whole day clear of work! The text does say that God finished working 'on the seventh day', and from the point of view of the Hebrew language, this really could mean either of these possibilities. The long tradition of the Sabbath however makes it doubtful that those who wrote this story down intended anything other than complete rest on the seventh day.

**The 'end' of creation** Secondly, scholars are not sure about where the first account of Creation ends. It is clear that another story begins halfway through verse 4, and we will begin to study this tomorrow. However, is the first sentence of verse 4 part of the end of the first story (Gen 1:1-2:3) or an introduction to the next (Gen 2:4bf)? I am of the opinion that it concludes the first story, because although the account of the seventh day does not finish with the words 'evening came and morning came ...' as with the other days (1:5,8,13,19,23,31), it describes the whole of creation as a 'record' (or a 'genealogy'). This is a word that normally refers to a record of ancestral births, as we find in many places in the Bible (see Matt 1:1-15), however, the story of creation is described in this way as God's 'Birth Certificate' for Creation. The world is God's, and it is alive!

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What does the Sabbath mean to you, and how do you practice it?
2. In what ways has this study given you a glimpse of how you might better receive and use the gift of God's Sabbath?
3. Do you believe that the Church has the right attitude to the Sabbath? If not, what is wrong and how may it be corrected?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*The challenge for a disciple of Jesus is to be obedient to God's command to rest for one day in seven, but not to do so in a legalistic manner. It can then be received as the gift it is meant to be. At the very least I suggest that every disciple finds one day per week in which they step back from all their normal work. It may well be good to take this Sabbath not just from formal work but also regular work in the home. However, only you can decide for yourself what is appropriate. The important thing is to DO IT. Much Christian ministry is compromised by church leaders and workers who are not able to receive God's blessing and gift of the Sabbath. They are burnt out.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Examine your own use of God's gift of the Sabbath. How can you better receive and use the Sabbath and so get a better focus on your own work and possibly your own ministry for the Lord?*
- *Pray that God's people will gain a better understanding of the gift of the Sabbath, and see it not as an imposition, but a means to liberty and freedom in spirit. Pray that what happens in church on Sunday will be honouring to God.*

## Final Prayer

We rest in You, great Lord of Creation. We rest in You, so that we may be refreshed and live our lives to do Your will. We rest in You to honour You and bless You, and to give You the praise and worship that is Your due, great Lord of Creation: AMEN