

Mears Ashby and Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone



**Prayers and Reflections
for use at home**

**Sunday 25 October 2020
Bible Sunday**

Welcome to this week's Prayers and Reflections. This week, we are celebrating God's gift of his holy Scriptures. As the second letter to Timothy says:

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable to teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that those who belong to God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Reading our bibles on a daily basis, with or without the help of bible notes and commentaries, is one of the key ways that we keep on growing as Christians. It is how we keep on learning what it is to love God with every fibre of our being and live as Jesus would do. Without our bibles, we would be like a yachtsperson who sets out to cross the Atlantic Ocean without taking any form of navigation aid!

Bible Sunday is an opportunity to pause and think about how, when and where we read our bibles. How is this helping us to feel close to God? How are we looking out for God's message to us?

We can scan a newspaper, but we need to slow down our reading when we open our bibles and prepare to listen.

May these prayers and reflections inspire and guide your daily walk with God as you listen to his inspirational words of encouragement and advice.

God bless,

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Prayers and Reflections for use at home Our Listening

PREPARING OURSELVES

Take a moment to be still in God's presence, and feel his love.

If you are indoors, you may wish to light a candle as a sign of God's love, here, in your room. You may also wish to have a cross in your palm, or on the table, and a bowl of water ready for the time of confession.

Lord, as I sit and wait in silence,
I place my hopes and dreams,
my fears and concerns,
into your safe and loving hands.
Pour your love into me,
and fill me with your peace;
in Jesus' name,
I pray. **Amen.**

LETTING GO

If you come to this time of prayer and reflection with any regrets, with things that you wish you had not said, done or been, or when you have failed to listen to God or to others, offer them to God in the silence of your heart. And, when you are ready, reflect on the opening words of our hymn.

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways!
Re-clothe us in our rightful mind,
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence praise,
in deeper reverence praise.



If you wish, dip your finger into a bowl of water and make the sign of the cross on your palm.

Feel God's forgiveness. God welcomes you back into his loving presence, you are his beloved child. Listen to his wise and loving words.

PRAYING TODAY'S PRAYER **(The Collect)**

Across our villages and the worldwide Church, this prayer is being said today. Add your voice to this earthly circle of prayer to our loving Father.

Blessed Lord,
who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:
help us to hear them,
to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them
that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word,
we may embrace and for ever hold fast
the hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Our prayer for Bible Sunday invites us to think about how we sit down to read our bibles. It encourages us to slow down our reading and take the time to notice what God is saying to us through this passage, parable, image or verse. It is all too easy for us to race through a familiar story and fail to notice God's hidden messages. Each one of Jesus' teachings is like a Russian doll that conceals multiple layers of meaning. Every time we open up one of his stories we find a deeper insight into God's Kingdom or an apt word of advice to guide our daily living.

It is why St. Benedict encouraged his monks to practise "Lectio Divina": reading the bible with hearts and minds open to God as if he were reading his words to us. We are invited to notice which word or phrase or idea God is pointing out to us. We pause to contemplate, pray and respond to God's guidance.

We inwardly digest his words.



LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

Listen to my words

Jesus said, 'Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven" with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Matthew 24:30-35

Finding the layers

Jesus is speaking to his team on the Mount of Olives as they look down on the city of Jerusalem. As they were leaving the temple earlier in the day, Jesus issued a warning:

'You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.' *Matthew 24:2*

It is a warning of the dangers to come.

On one level, it speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD70 when all that they see before them will be reduced to ruins. Jews, and Christians, will be dispersed across the Mediterranean. It is hard for us to imagine their pain at this cataclysmic loss of God's beloved city plus the land he given them to live in. It would be a very sad end to life as they believed God intended it to be.

On another level, it heralds in the rule of the Son of Man as promised in the Book of Daniel. Christ the King has authority over the whole globe.

It is no longer limited to one people, one place, one nation. Destroying the city that rejected him sets his message free to roam across the earth. On yet another level, it speaks of the persecution that his team will face after his death and resurrection. They will need to trust in God's plan and stay firm in their faith, and keep on watching for his signs and words, whilst not being distracted by false prophets who claim to know when Christ will return. As you can look at a fig tree and see that it is budding ready for fruitful growth, so his team should look for signs of Christ's Kingdom coming into life and join in with him.



And finally, it speaks of those end times when Christ will return and the earth will be reborn. It speaks of the Christian hope of a perfect life after life after death. Early Christians expected this to come in their lifetime. Two thousand years on, we have learnt to live with this as a future hope, whilst focusing on living life in all its fullness - now - in the present times. It is an invitation to place our confidence in God's steadfast presence, loving provision and caring desire for his creation even when life feels as tough as it did for the disciples in the early days of his Church.

Jesus' apocalyptic vision can be read on at least four levels as well as speaking directly into our own situation.

Listening to God's words

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.' They have the power to speak into every season of our life. What is God saying to you through today's passage? Let's open ourselves to him through a four step Lectio Divina.

Read our Gospel reading again. Keep a few moments' silence.

Re-read the passage. Notice which word or phrase speaks to your open and willing heart.

Consider this word or phrase. What might God be saying to you? What questions does it raise? Pray for God's guidance.

Having heard his loving words, give heartfelt thanks to God for his speaking.

A Prayer of Response

from Rise and hear! The Lord is speaking.

Speak to us, O Lord, believing,
as we hear, the sower sows;
may our hearts,
your word receiving,
be the good ground
where it grows.



A hymn by HCA Gaunt (1902-1983)

God's Word is timeless

Jesus' teaching is as timeless as it is priceless. Whilst spoken to those who were gathered around to listen, for their time and season, Jesus' words live on long beyond their first speaking. Thanks to the Gospel writers who captured the memories of his disciples and to God's Spirit continually breathing fresh life and meaning into them. For me, Jesus' vision is an invitation to look beyond the current coronavirus crisis and see God's eternal vision for his creation. All of this pain and sadness is held in God's heart as he looks forward to his Son's return. Christ is as much in charge now as he was at the beginning of time when his light shone into the chaotic darkness. Keep on looking toward his light and believe.

OUR PRAYERS

Here are some prayers on this Sunday's theme. Feel free to use one or more of these prayers, and to add your own.

Heavenly Father, the holy Scriptures are full of your words spoken for everyone yet written just to me.

Open my heart and my mind to your loving presence within each passage and verse. Plant your words deep within me. Sow them into my life.

Father, hear my prayer.

Father, the holy Scriptures are full of your wisdom and your love for the whole of creation.

In a world filled with the chaos and darkness caused by the coronavirus and by selfish desires, we pray that your Word will be heard. Your will be done. I pray for...

Father, hear my prayer.

Father, the holy Scriptures are full of stories of your divine intervention, where your Son spoke and a body, mind or soul was healed.

Your will was done through his healing words.

Lord, many are the lives filled with pain and sadness, many are the cries of distress. In confidence, I lift up to you...

Father, hear my prayer.

Offer your own heartfelt prayers and yearnings, praise and thanksgivings.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF BLESSING

A closing prayer of blessing for this week.

Lord, bless and guide me,
whatever I do, whether at home or outside.

Go before me, watch over me,
and keep me, and my loved ones, safe in your love. **Amen.**