

## Prayer

Lord God Almighty, give us a spirit of praise! We thank You for our lives and the world in which we live; we praise You for the saving work of Jesus Christ; we thank You for each other and for the love we find within our fellowship, and we praise You for Your glory and power, as revealed to us through Your Word. Lord God Almighty, may the spirit of praise never leave us! AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Sabbath

- *Pray for the world, and for the conflicts that tear nations apart*
- *Pray for God's blessing on this world and its people*
- *Pray for people who are born into darkness, that they may see light*
- *Pray for those who are sick and cannot receive any form of medical help*
- *Pray for all who are afflicted by bullying and inhumanity at work*
- *Pray for the unity of God's people*

## Meditation

The Lord is waiting, patiently:

He is the voice we have never heard before;

The voice that speaks in stillness.

He is the hand that works to free our burden;

The strength that brings our freedom.

He is the ear that listens to every word we say;

The one who notes our every need.

He is the soul's companion in the trials of life;

The friend whose love will never tire.

He is the judge who maintains truth and justice;

The arbiter of right and wrong.

He is the guide who is ready to lead the way;

The faithful servant of our every need.

He is the One who speaking in the wind and rain,

He is testing us through what we do,

He is waiting every day for our clear response,

He is our God, and He longs to save us.

## Bible Study - Hebrews 4:9-16

<sup>9</sup> Therefore a Sabbath rest is still available for the people of God; <sup>10</sup> and those who enter God's rest stop from their own labours just as God did from His. <sup>11</sup> So let us spare no effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fail because of the same kind of disobedience.

<sup>12</sup> For the Word of God is vigorous and full of life; sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to divide soul from spirit, and joints from marrow, discerning the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. <sup>13</sup> There is nothing created which is hidden from Him, and all are exposed and laid bare to the eyes of the One to whom we must account.

<sup>14</sup> We therefore have a great High Priest who has passed over to the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathise with our limitations, but we have One who has been tested in every way like ourselves; and yet is without sin. <sup>16</sup> Therefore let us come near to the Throne of Grace with confidence, to receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

## Review

This is a well known passage of Scripture because of a number of verses and phrases within it that have become well used within Christian tradition. Its best known texts are 'for the Word of God is vigorous ... sharper than any two edged sword.' (4:12), and 'for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our limitations, but we have One who has been tested in every way like ourselves; and yet is without sin' (4:15), and 'let us come near to the Throne of Grace ... to receive mercy and find grace ...' (4:16). From such a memorable passage of Scripture, I suggest we add to this great roll-call of Scriptural honour, 'a Sabbath rest is still available for the people of God; and those who enter God's rest stop from their labours just as God did from His.' (4:10).

If you have followed recent studies on this web site, you will be aware that this is the third in a series of articles about the Sabbath. The articles arose because of a need for me to explain why I have stopped writing devotions for Sundays, and why future Sundays will have no more than a minimal single page with some suggestions for prayer and reflection.

In the two articles written so far, I have traced the Biblical development of the Sabbath from the Old Testament to the New, and explained why the Biblical Sabbath (Saturday) is not the day of worship we call the Sabbath today (Sunday). The basic Scriptural principle is that the Sabbath is a day of rest, and we honour God by resting for one day in seven, and regular worship on a Sunday is a completely different matter. Indeed, those who have followed my recent studies in Exodus will realise that the regular worship practiced by the priests in the Tabernacle and the Temple was twice-daily, not once a week (see Exodus 29:30f.). If we were to explore Scripture to try and find the best routine for regular worship, we would find a number of suggestions, from continually, to twice daily, to weekly, to occasionally! Worship is something that should arise from the heart of God's people, and it is not necessarily connected with the Sabbath, which is a 'day of rest'.

How then can we honour the Sabbath day? It is the fourth of the Ten Commandments and the second instruction given by God to people on earth after the world was made (Genesis 2:1-3, and remember that the first instruction was 'be fruitful ... multiply ... and have dominion ...', Genesis 1:28). In addition to these Old Testament texts, the reading I have chosen for today indicates that the Sabbath continues to be a relevant principle for God's people, even in New Testament times.

I strongly suggest that each of us consider taking God's Word seriously and accept that His advice to take one day's rest in seven is indeed something He asks us to do. This is not a polite request; Scripture clearly says it is His will for us, not because He wants to impose some abstract rules on us, but because it is part of the created order of the world, and it works. If we keep a Sabbath day of rest, then we will be refreshed and be less stressed; we will enjoy our lives more and honour our Maker. It may not seem to be as important as

this, but it is. In general, just as God has made people so that if they exercise they will be happier and sleep better (a physiological fact), so they will be properly rested and more able to cope with the stresses and strains of life if they take one day in seven as a break from their work.

So how do we do this? How do we organise a Sabbath Day? On the one hand, Christians have a personal duty to God to rest one day in seven whatever their social circumstances. On the other hand, if all Christians witnessed to the benefits of God's Sabbath in a united manner, then there would be a consistent witness to God's Word in the world! Where possible, I would suggest that it is wise to honour the traditional Sabbath (Sunday) together with other Christians, because the only likely consensus for this will be Sunday. However, there are some serious limitations to putting this into practise. The most important issues is that in many countries, the Christian witness of the Sabbath is regarded by society with scorn, and people often regard Christians as somewhat hypocritical about it. Without some radical re-working of the church's approach to the Sabbath day, its witness to the world is severely limited. In addition to this, the amount of work put into worship services and other Christian activities on a Sunday is enormous (in some churches), and to say 'it is God's work' is not the point. God asks His people to honour Him through rest! Some have no idea that personal rest can be worshipful!

Because of this, I suggest that whilst each of us should play our part in this on-going debate about the collective practice of the Sabbath and its witness to society, each of us would be wise to ensure that personally, we have one day a week that is free from our normal work. Most people have different working patterns of employment, so the opportunities for choice are considerable, especially if you feel that the 'church work' you do on Sunday means that it cannot be called a day of rest! Some might choose Saturdays as their 'Sabbath', or another day depending on your working week. When I was a working church minister, I chose Tuesday!

Whatever day you choose, make sure that it is honouring of God's call upon you to rest. If you make lifestyle changes to put this into effect, you will be blessed, because this is what God asks us to do in order to honour Him. He is always faithful to His promises.

God bless you

*Paul H Ashby*