

Prayers

To God

Pray in honest love and intent for the world to praise its Maker. Yourself, praise the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and might.

For myself

Weekly theme: Discipline

Ask the Lord to help you with the spiritual disciplines of your 'quiet times' and your personal devotions.

For others

Dear Jesus, You love people, and we find this very hard. Some people offend us, some people make life difficult for us, some people tread on our toes as if they have not known it ... Give us the courage, dear Jesus, to trust You and treat all people the same, and with dignity, so that we break the cycles of anger and frustration which bedevil human relationships. Lead us into all truth we pray, for Jesus' sake: AMEN

Meditation

Show us something of Yourself, Lord.

Show us Creation in all its splendour;
Show us Salvation in all its graciousness;
Show us Redemption in all its completeness;

Show us Holiness in all its magnificence;
Show us Majesty in all its authority;
Show us Splendour in all its glory;

Show us Faith in all its fruitfulness;
Show us Hope in all its fulfilment;
Show us Love in all its contentment;

Show us Jesus, for He is all these things, for us.

Bible Passage

Genesis 1:1-2

¹ In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,

² the earth was empty and had no meaning, and darkness covered the surface of the abyss, while the spirit of God swept over the waters.

Review

The first two verses in the Bible are incredibly powerful, because they describe God's creative activity with great beauty and authority, and imply much more. They also announce an abiding truth about the whole world, which is that everything we experience is the product of God's work and design. Before time existed, before history and science, before the elements of the universe were structured, and before all the senses were perceivable, God began His creative activity. It would be foolish of us to say that we can ever fathom the full depth of these words, because they mean so much. However, the wonder of Scripture is that in these incredibly powerful verses, God has given us a feel for the truth behind the Universe, telling us that everything we know and experience comes from Him. If we are willing to accept this, we have a starting place to explore not just the nature of our created world, but also the reason for our own existence and our relationship with the God who has made us.

This first chapter of Genesis as a whole reveals the unprecedented access God has given us to His world. He has opened the door to His extraordinary craftsmanship of which we are a part, and He must not just create but also speak of what He has done, to reveal the power behind the Universe. We see the Creator in His creation, and He invites us to explore it.

Verse 1 states the truth underpinning existence; God made everything. It is like a summary of the whole of Genesis 1:1 - 2:3, and perhaps even the whole of Genesis itself. However, it is linked grammatically to the second verse which gives a dramatic picture of 'before' creation. The state of the world before God 'spoke' Creation into being (see '*God said "let there be light"*' – Gen 1:3) is '*empty*' and '*without meaning*'. Matter and time do not yet exist as we might think of it; there is no universe and no structure for life. The whole of creation as described in the famous 'six days' of Genesis 1 happens against the backdrop of this desert-like emptiness and chaos, devoid of meaning.

In general, the Bible describes God as constantly active. After the two verses that start the whole Bible, God never stops making things, doing things, and giving structure to things that have no form or shape without Him; for example, the New Testament describes God as '*creating*' and '*building up*' His church (Ephesians 4:11ff etc.). God is mentioned over four thousand times in the Bible, and in nearly every instance He is doing something. His work is often physical, such as leading the people of Israel out of Egypt, but it is also spiritual. Psalm 139, for example, uses the same word for '*create*' found here in Genesis 1:1 in this famous passage: '*for it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.*' This is arguably the most beautiful description of the creation of humanity ever written.

The coming studies of Genesis 1 will uncover some intriguing revelations about both God and His creation, but whatever else we may say about the nature of creation, the creative power of God is undoubtedly His Spirit (1:2). The Spirit of God (or in Hebrew, His 'breath') broods over emptiness, chaos and disorder, awaiting the Word of God to trigger action (1:3), and throughout Genesis 1, behind the scenes, the Spirit acts in unimaginable power to put

into action what God speaks. In the dramatic picture of verse 2, the Spirit is poised awaiting this action, and God Himself is ready.

We should not forget that Genesis 1 reaches its climax in the creation of people (1:26,27), where we read that men and women are both self conscious and aware of their surroundings. So, the words we read in Genesis 1:1 and 2 are the result of people becoming conscious of themselves, of God, and also their surroundings, and writing all this down. Such people cannot be described as 'primitive', as they so often are, just because they are ancient, and we do a disservice to humanity if we suggest that these words are anything less than the fruit of mature reflection and passionate belief born of much human experience.

When, today, we engage in the great science versus the Bible debate, we should respect the extraordinary insight, faith and revelation of those who penned this account. It was written with great insight of the human condition and the nature of the God who made the world, and these words are not to be dismissed as irrelevant just because what they say appears not to fit the processes of science used by our own age. At a time when in its deeply human maturity, Genesis may yet have far much more to teach us than we know.

Discipleship

Application

Something out of nothing

There are many arguments about whether the Bible describes creation out of nothing, or out of something. Some say that the Spirit must have been brooding over something out of which God has made the world in which we live, for example. Others say that verse 2 is poetic language for nothing, and no more! Whatever we believe, we had better be careful because we are trying to look at ancient texts with modern eyes and it will not easily work. If we stand back and read the text as a poetic description of God's real and true creative work, we can be inspired to believe in His creative power and trust Him as Creator.

The Spirit who gets things done!

The idea of the work of the Spirit in creation is powerful. God is always at work doing things both seen and unseen to the human eye. This is obvious, of course, in the way that a child is created in the mother's womb, but there are so many more examples for us to find. If we can grasp the idea that God is always at work around us doing things which enable our world to function, then this can help us in many ways. It enables us to understand something powerful about creation, and it enable us to perceive that the Spirit is the means whereby the Lord our God can indeed get things done. In addition, knowing this can enable us to say our prayers with more courage and conviction!

Ideas for what to do

- *During the day, look around you and think about what God is doing even at that moment, to hold what you see in existence. Wonder at the power and majesty of God that is present in the world, and let this flow out of you in prayer.*
- *Try to talk to others about what you see God doing in the world around you, and find out whether people think of God as active in the world or largely absent from it.*

Listen carefully to what people say, so that you gain a greater understanding of people's attitudes to creation.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What do you believe about the relationship between science and Genesis 1? Would you say you have an open or a closed mind on this?
2. In what ways are you conscious of God's continuing work of creation today?
3. What does the Spirit do in creation? In answering this question, consider spiritual answers as well as physical ones.

Final Prayer

Lord God, You see far beyond our sight, You hear above our hearing, and You speak words beyond our understanding. Yet, through our Saviour Jesus, we are privileged to see You, to hear You, and to speak with you; for in Him, Your re-creative power has given us new life! Thank You Lord God. AMEN