

Prayers

To God

Come before the Lord with fear and trembling, for He love you and He is Your judge. What does the Lord God have to say to you today, and how does His justice and love apply to you today?

For myself

I am in awe, Lord God, of Your power and Your authority. You make life in a woman's womb, You inspire creativity and energy in the lives of men and women, and You guide the destiny of all give You their trust. Your plan for the whole world is absolute and perfect, Lord God. Show me now the love and passion that drives it, and be merciful I pray. AMEN

For others

Weekly theme: Child abuse

Pray for those who have experienced abuse within the church. There is no security in pointing the finger of blame for this at the Catholic church alone, for as every counsellor knows, it is prevalent throughout the church, wherever the devil has been allowed to fester for too long. Pray that all God's people will exercise due vigilance against this pernicious evil.

Meditation

Serve the Lord; serve Him without ceasing:
there is no reward, except peace with God

Serve Him through living the life of a servant:
and loving other people, with all your heart.

Serve the Lord by giving Him your worship:
by joining in the praise of all who worship!

Serve Him by accepting the Great Commission:
and taking the Good News to the ends of the earth.

Serve Him by being His priests within the world:
by praying for others and addressing their needs.

Serve the Lord with honesty and dedication:
living every day by the light of His presence.

Serve the Lord by fighting against evil:
wherever you find it, in your life and in others'.

Serve the Lord; serve Him without ceasing.
There are no substitutes for His perfect will.

Bible Passage

Psalm 10:1-11

- 1 Why, O LORD, do you stand far off?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?
- 2 In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor
- let them be caught in the schemes they have devised.
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- 3 For the wicked boast of the desires of their heart,
those greedy for gain curse and renounce the LORD.
- 4 In the pride of their countenance the wicked say,
'God will not seek it out';
all their thoughts are, 'There is no God.'
- 5 Their ways prosper at all times;
your judgments are on high, out of their sight;
as for their foes, they scoff at them.
- 6 They think in their heart, 'We shall not be moved;
throughout all generations we shall not meet adversity.'
- 7 Their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression;
under their tongues are mischief and iniquity.
- 8 They sit in ambush in the villages;
in hiding places they murder the innocent.

Their eyes stealthily watch for the helpless;
- 9 they lurk in secret like a lion in its covert;
They lurk that they may seize the poor;
they seize the poor and drag them off in their net.
- 10 They stoop, they crouch,
and the helpless fall by their might.
- 11 They think in their heart, 'God has forgotten,
He has hidden his face, he will never see it,

Review

The first verse of Psalm 10 describes the frustration of feeling that the Lord is distant, if not absent. The well-known poem 'footprints' describes something similar: a believer imagines walking with the Lord along the seashore, but only sees one set of footprints; finally it is revealed that the footprints belong to the Lord who carries the believer during a time of trial. Psalm 10 does not deal with the issue of God's apparent absence in the same way, however! After verse 1, the psalm describes the rebellious schemes of the wicked who believe that God is indeed absent, and it begins with a powerful reminder that the behaviour of the wicked is ignorant (10:2), however successful it may appear to be. If we feel sorely tested by the apparent absence of our Lord, then later verses in this psalm encourage us not to believe that God is absent, but to hold firm to our faith; but these verses focus resolutely on wickedness and rebellion against God.

Verses 2 to 6 are about wickedness. It is an interesting poetic reflection which goes backwards, step by step showing what lies behind wicked actions, and it starts by describing the persecution of the poor (verse 2). The psalm then looks to see what attitudes lie behind such perversity (boastfulness, greed - verse 3) and what gives rise to this evil; people say God is not just absent, He doesn't exist (10:4). Then, in verse 6, the root of the problems is made clear. The wicked are content without God and believe they can live quite happily without Him.

I recently came across a young Indian lady who worked in a factory under illegal conditions. When asked why she put up with it she said that the factory would close if the boss paid the legal rates; national insurance, holiday pay, etc. On another occasion I asked her about her boss; to which she said, 'he is very rich, he has big houses ...!' We do not have to look hard to find example of such godlessness today. Christian faith has taught for thousands of years that interdependence and respect for the value of each human being lie at the heart of successful human endeavour, but this is meaningless to people who live in a materialistic society where you can get all you want by trampling on others. Those who abandon God and discover that things go well start on the slippery slope to many evils. Their world revolves around their own needs to the exclusion of others; this is the root of wickedness and evil.

In verses 7 to 11, the psalm gives us a glimpse of a world of wickedness that seems almost surreal. Indeed, some commentators regard verses 7-11 as a metaphor, a pictorial description of wrongdoing, rather than a realistic assessment of ultimate wickedness and evil; for while the wicked continue to believe that God is not watching, the stage is set for the most heinous crimes of murder and savagery, preceded by threats and cursing (10:8-10). The language of this section reads like a description of demonic activity. Certainly, Satan ensnares the Lord's people with the same guile and cunning described here (10:8,9), and Peter picks up this theme in his letter: 'Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour' (1 Peter 5:8). We should remember, though, that it is people who do evil, however Satan has enticed them or used situations to ensnare people, and the further people move away from God the more extreme and violent their deeds.

Few of us have been close to murder and threats of personal harm, though we have seen it in films and television. Those of us who have experienced it know how utterly life changing such evil can be. My wife, my family and I were caught up in the evil power games of ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe and saw the country's tragedy played out on a local scale, resulting in the death and martyrdom of Jean & Luke Khumalo at Thekwane School, Plumtree, in December 1985. The evil in that country continues, yet it is only a small sample of the true force of evil in our world.

A Christian who reads this psalm will know that Jesus bore the force of godless evil as he died on the Cross. This psalm is not directly about Jesus, but it is a description of the evil

that was focussed upon Him as he died. Throughout His life, the religious people around Him denied God, rejected Him, and condemned Him to death. However, we know that this is not the end of the story and that evil has been conquered by Christ. Because of this, we need have no fear when our Lord seems far away. He may be carrying us or He may be testing us, but there is no reason or need for us to abandon hope in Him, however tough the call.

Discipleship

Application

Being open to the Lord's promoting

I find it an ever present challenge to keep the Lord in mind as I do my daily work, and also as I do those things each day that mark my own discipleship; my prayer, reading of God's word etc. However, I feel deeply aware that my discipleship should be expressed in far more ways than this, and I also know that whilst doing the daily routine of work and leisure, it is easy to forget that I have any obligations to the Lord. Somehow, the things of God need to become part of my very existence, so that I am open to the guidance of the Spirit at any time. This is what I need to keep me from going astray.

Ideas for what to do

- How do you feel when you do something that is specifically 'for the Lord'? How often does this happen? Life can roll on by without much happening for weeks, months, years, and we barely feel that we have stepped out of 'normal'. The Lord has better for us than this, but we need to seek it.
- Pray for young Christians who are striving to be disciples and learning the art of living a Christian life, and are subject to many influences. Pray that God will work powerfully through the younger Christians you know, and enable them to discover ways of living that are truly godly.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. When are you tempted to say that God is 'far away' and does not care? Is this like rebellion against God, or is this too harsh a judgement?
2. How many of the evil acts recorded in this passage are typical of what can be observe today, and how?
3. Jesus suffered because of the unbelief of those around him. How is unbelief expressed today in the church and in society?

Final Prayer

Help me Lord God, to make sense of what you are teaching me this day. Show me how to be as 'wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove'. Give me the eyes of an eagle to see Satan

prowling around like a roaring lion, and strengthen my heart so that love motivates my every deed. I seek this for Your glory; AMEN