

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

The glory and majesty of Your work, Almighty God is ever present in the beauty of a raindrop and the majesty of the Universe. Give us eyes to appreciate both the intricate detail of Your creation and its stupendous magnitude; and give us hearts and minds to value both. May we never cease to find You at work throughout Your world, and give You the praise which is Your due. AMEN

### Prayer Suggestions

**Prayer ideas** *(Alternatives that can broaden the experience of prayer)*

Walk around a garden or park, and dedicate this time to the Lord in prayer. Let what you see hear and smell help you in your prayers, and let your soul praise God in whatever circumstances you find yourself

#### **On-going prayers**

- **Pray for those who work with the text of Scripture.** *Although ancient Bible versions are outside copyright, new versions are protected, and business interests affect the distribution of God's Word. Pray that Bible publishers will respect the God's Word is more important than commerce.*
- *Pray for those who face unemployment. Pray for the economy of your country and for those who govern it*
- *Give thanks to God for food and drink and for the people with who you share it today*

### Meditation

Almighty God and Lord of all;

Be as bright as the midday sun  
shining brightly through a morning mist;

Be as firm under my feet  
as a well constructed and well directed path;

Be clearer to my insight  
than even the best advertisement on TV;

Be as exciting and inviting  
as an open roadway stretching out before me,

Be as close and accessible to me  
as the gentle touch of a breeze upon my face.

Be my truth and my reality  
Today, tonight, and forever.

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## Bible Study

### Bible passage – Psalm 17

A prayer of David.

- <sup>1</sup> O LORD, hear my plea for what is right;  
listen to my cry.  
Give ear to my prayer,  
spoken without deceit.
- <sup>2</sup> May I be proved right by You;  
may Your eyes see what is right.

- 3 You have probed my heart  
and examined me at night,  
test me; and You will find no wrong in me  
and my mouth will not give me away.
- 4 As for what other people do,  
well, I have avoided the ways of the violent  
because of Your word.
- 5 Keep my steps securely on Your paths,  
so that my feet do not slip.
- 6 I call on you, O God, for You will answer me;  
listen to me and hear my prayer.
- 7 Show the wonder of your great and faithful love,  
You who powerfully save  
those who take refuge in You from their enemies.
- 8 Keep me as the apple of your eye;  
hide me in the shadow of Your wings
- 9 from the wicked who oppress me,  
from my deadly enemies who surround me.
- 10 Their attitudes are fixed,  
and arrogance comes out of their mouths.
- 11 They have tracked me down,  
with eyes alert to pin me down.
- 12 They are like a lion hungry for prey,  
like a young lion crouching and ready to pounce.
- 13 Rise up, O LORD, confront them, overthrow them;  
rescue me from the wicked by Your sword
- 14 By your hand, O LORD,  
save me from such people.  
Those of this world who have all they need  
and enjoy the rewards of this life,  
who have plenty of children  
and pass on their inheritance to them.
- 15 And as for me,  
I shall see Your face through righteousness;  
when I awake, I shall be satisfied  
with everything I know about You.

## Review

Psalm 17 is a personal prayer asking the Lord for help, and it is properly called a prayer of petition rather than a prayer of intercession (which is normally about other people). As with many psalms, it is unclear whether it was written primarily for personal use or to be used in the Temple or a synagogue, but it is useful for us both for private prayer and for public worship.

The Psalm begins with a cry asking the Lord to accept that the believer is right about something. Indeed, this is the theme of the whole Psalm. Because of this, many Christians find it difficult to read Psalm 17. What it says may sound right from the perspective of the Jewish people of the old Testament, but today, we have been brought up with a traditional Protestant emphasis on 'original sin', and the idea that all are sinners before God, without exception. So, to read these words makes for uncomfortable reading; *'hear my plea for what is right; listen to my cry'* (17:1). Nevertheless, this is Scripture, and our Psalm reflects the natural and frequent prayer of those who believe they are right about something, are troubled by wrongdoing, and call upon the Lord to confirm what they believe.

There is much we can learn from this Psalm, and it begins by asking us to measure our words and actions against God's. It tells us that we should seek vindication from the Lord, and not by means of our own judgement (17:2), that we should ensure we do not sin in our speech (17:3), that we should avoid violence (17:4) and that we should walk in the Lord's ways (17:5). All of this reflects an intent to live a godly life, and if we read this now as advice for how to live the life of faith rather than about how to go about being saved, then we are on the right track.

After this advice, verses 6, 7 and 8 demonstrate a remarkable and controversial confidence in God. It talks of confidence that the Lord will listen to our prayers, saying, *'for you will answer me; listen to me and hear my prayer'* (17:6). Many people feel very coy about presuming God will answer our requests, because their experience is either that they feel God does not answer or they do not get what they want. This psalm, however, is not about the ordinary wants and desires of everyday life, it is about seeking refuge from evil and

all that is wrong in this world, and God is always ready to save His people from evil. In verse 7, the writer of the psalm turns away from complaining about problems to having confidence in God's character, to, '*powerfully save those who take refuge in You from their enemies*'. God is passionate about people and longs to hear and act on requests for help. He has been doing this for centuries, showing His faithful, covenant love by saving His people individually and collectively. We can therefore pray for the Lord to do this His will in total confidence that He will do this despite all difficulties.

The next verse (17:8) is well known, and contains a great hidden treasure; '*keep me as the apple of Your eye*'. The 'apple of the eye' is a loose translation of the Hebrew, in which the word of 'apple' could well refer to the 'pupil' of the eye, meaning the centre of the eye. What a remarkable description of the closeness of God to His own, that they are so close to Him that each can see the other in the pupil of the eye! The second half of the verse is just as graphic, for the phrase, '*hide me in the shadow of Your wings*' is a picture of a mother hen brooding over her chicks! It is right that we do not approach God with presumptuous familiarity, but those who have been saved through Christ know that they have been drawn close to God.

However, to be close to the Lord is not what Satan wants! Evil has always defined itself by opposing God's people and deflecting them away from God, and it is not surprising that the psalm now sounds a note of caution. It speaks of the evil of being assaulted (17:9) by those who have callous and arrogant hearts (17:10), and the fear of being hunted down by evil (17:11). The picture of a lion hunting prey further illustrates the animal nature of evil in the hearts of people (17:12). The language is prosaic, but it reflects the truth about all life, for evil is always at hand, and we would be foolish not to recognise this.

Verse 14 goes on to warn God's people that the source of evil is often riches and worldly prosperity. The last few verses of Psalm 17 are difficult to translate and some Bible versions do not make this clear, but the translation above says clearly that evil resides in, '*those of this world who have all they need and enjoy the rewards of this life, who have plenty of children and pass on their inheritance to them*' (17:14). These words are typical of the large number of Biblical passages that warn us today of the dangers of wealth, and we need to hear this message. Perhaps the best way for us to interpret this is not to blame rich people for evil, but to recognise that with riches lie the most dangers; this gets more to the heart of what the Psalm says here.

All in all, this psalm does not encourage God's people to act on their own against evil (17:13). Rather, it suggests they should cherish their salvation. They should prayerfully bring their troubles to the Lord and trust in His strength to bring justice; in addition, they should do His will on a daily basis, as He directs, and avoid the evils especially those found in wealth. In this way, they do not ignore the evil, rather, they are active in prayer, obedient in all things and willing to do God's will.

The psalm ends with a confident affirmation of what it means to be in the Lord's presence, '*I shall see Your face ... I shall be satisfied ...*' (17:15). If there were any doubts, this confirms that our Psalm stands firmly in the Old Testament tradition of the privilege of God's people to draw very close to Him, and their duty to do His will.

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## Discipleship

### Application

#### **Speaking to God**

It is a fascinating fact that many of the psalms are written in the first person and addressed to God, and therefore full of the words 'I' and 'me'. This is quite different from the rest of the Bible where the narratives are written mostly in the third person ('he' did this, 'they' did that ...), and rarely mentioning personal thoughts. Because of this the Psalms reads rather like testimony, and as such, this is a powerful reminder of the importance of the individual to God's Church and its mission. The psalms are certainly the one place in the Bible where an individual can go and read directly about personal emotions and feelings, but these are always connected to reflections about the work of God in the world, His people, or the individual.

### Questions for groups

1. Have you felt at any time that others have accused you of dishonesty when you truly believe you have acted properly? How does this psalm help or hope for this context?
2. Do you feel 'treasured' (17:8) by God? How important is it to feel close to the Lord of all? Are there times when we should stand back from God in awe, and if so, when?
3. Is it right to pray for the downfall of those who oppose God? In your circumstances, who might this be?

## Discipleship challenges

- *Think about some of the difficult circumstance you have faced over this last week. Read carefully through this psalm to see if it offers you any help or guidance in dealing with these situations.*
  - *Psalm 17 is written in the 'first person', which means that it is a direct address to God. Are you able to speak directly to God, as if he was someone else in your presence? Read through this psalm gain bearing all this in mind.*
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## Final Prayer

Dear Jesus, may we speak to You honestly and listen to You carefully, so that we may learn to distinguish Your voice from the clamour of everything around us. We long to learn more of Your will and be obedient throughout our lives, and therefore demonstrate the abiding faith we have in You; AMEN

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