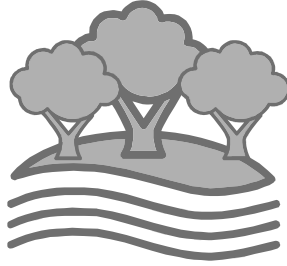


# **CREATION WAITS IN EAGER EXPECTATION**



## **PRAYERS OF THE EARTH**

*Scripture:*

**Romans 8**

### *Creation awaits*

16. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.
17. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.
18. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.
19. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.
20. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope
21. that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.
22. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.
23. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.
24. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?
25. But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.
26. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

...

### *If God is for us*

31. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?
32. He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?
33. Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.
34. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.
35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?
36. As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."
37. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

38. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,  
 39. neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.



## PRAYER

I pray more often now than when I was a child. I pray differently than when I was a child. Sometimes I pray with people, and sometimes I pray for people.

## TWO GENERATIONS

I found a beautiful children's book called *Grandad's Prayers of the Earth* that will be our reference this morning. It is about a boy and his grandfather discovering spiritual things in the forest. We have learned a lot about grandparenting this month, as well as issues that adult families have to learn, and I will use this book as a portion of the class on Wednesday, together with slides of the pictures that I cannot show very well this morning.

## FROM A SOCIAL WORKER WHO REVIEWED IT

Every person that I have shared this book with has then gone out and bought it themselves, either to keep or to give as a gift to someone the story reminded them of. My parents and sister both requested their own copies, and I bought one for my infant nephew with an inscription encouraging him to carry the story in his heart so that he too will one day hear the prayers of the earth. Ironically, it will probably be most meaningful and poignant to the adults. I would not alter one word of the text, and the illustrations are equally exemplary and evocative.

## ANOTHER REVIEW - ANNE QUAKER:

Essentially this is a book about loss, dying and eternal life. It can be a beginning point for a discussion with older children (ages 8 - 16 or so) who have experienced a loss of any beloved friend or family member.

If I had grandchildren, I'd want to have the hardcover book available for them to read. The book is written to offer room for people of nearly any faith (even agnostics) to begin a discussion about the meaning of life and dying.

## A SPIRITUAL BOOK, NOT A THEOLOGICAL BOOK

Before I read it, one more thought. This is a spiritual book, not a theological book. It is a book about relationships, but it is not about the first century church. We would find it in the applied spirituality section, not the literary review. I like books from both sections of the library. But take off your New Testament professor hat, and replace it with a walking stick, a grandfather and his grandson.

Listen from the point of view of the grandfather and the grandson. If you can hear both voices, then I think you'll love this story as much as I do.

If you have a favorite nature hike, then let this story take you there today.

## GRANDAD'S PRAYERS OF THE EARTH

By Douglas Wood cc. 1999

WHEN I WAS LITTLE, MY GRANDAD  
 WAS MY BEST FRIEND.  
 BEING WITH HIM ALWAYS MADE THE  
 WORLD SEEM JUST RIGHT.  
 GRANDAD AND I LIKED TO GO FOR  
 WALKS IN THE WOODS TOGETHER.  
 WE DIDN'T WALK VERY FAR.  
 OR VERY FAST. OR VERY STRAIGHT.

While we walked, I would ask him questions I wasn't sure of.

"Why is it, Grandad...?"

And "What if...?"

And "Does it ever...?"

One day while we were walking in the woods, I asked my Grandad about prayers.

For a long time, Grandad was quiet. He didn't say anything until we came to some of the tallest trees in the forest.

And then he answered my question with a question.

"Did you know, boy, that trees pray?" he said.

"They reach and reach - for clouds and sun and moon and stars.

What else is reaching for heaven, but a prayer?"

I thought about the trees and kept listening for them, and while I thought I sat down on an old, mossy rock.

"Rocks pray, too," my Grandad said. "Pebbles and boulders and old weathered hills. They are still and silent and those are two important ways to pray - to be still and to be silent."

I thought hard about the rocks, and then I picked up a pebble and stuck the praying rock in my pocket.

We walked a little farther and came to a small stream. The water splashed and sparkled and tiny fish hovered in the shadows.

"Do streams pray, too, Grandad?" I asked.

"Yes, they do," Grandad answered. "And so do lakes and rivers and waters of all kinds. Sometimes they pray silently like the rocks. Sometimes they reflect the clouds, or birds, or sunsets, or the first evening star.

"Sometimes they pray with movement, flowing across the face of the earth. The rivers give themselves to the oceans. Sometimes they pray with laughter, chuckling to their friends the rocks, and sometimes they pray by dancing, leaping into the air, and falling back again."

These are all ways to pray: reflecting, moving, laughing and dancing. But there are more.

"The tall grass prays as it waves its arms beneath the sky, and flowers pray as they breathe their sweetness into the air.

"The wind prays as it whispers and moans and sighs. It is saying a prayer and singing a hymn at the same time.

"A bird prays when it sings the first songs of morning, and it prays in that silent moment just before it sings. And the robin's last song at sundown is an evening prayer.

"All the beings of the world pray," said my Grandad, as they slip through the forest or sparkle in the water...as they climb mountainsides or soar into the clouds or burrow into the earth.

"Each living thing gives its life to the beauty of all life, and that gift is its prayer."

Then we were quiet. My Grandfather was watching something far away, and I was thinking about all that he had said, about rocks and trees and grass and birds and flowers. Finally, I asked him to tell me about the prayers that people pray.

Grandad smiled and ruffled my hair. "People pray some of the most wonderful prayers of all," he said.

"Bending down to smell a flower can be a prayer," said my Grandad.

"Quietly watching the sunrise, feeling the slow turning of the earth and saying hello to a new day is one of the oldest prayers.

"Standing in snowy woods on a winter day and watching your breath become part of the breath of the world is a way to pray.

"Making music or painting a picture can be a prayer.

"HOLDING HANDS AROUND THE TABLE WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS, REMEMBERING ALL THAT HOLDS US TOGETHER AND GIVING THANKS IS ONE OF THE GREAT PRAYERS.

"Sometimes," said Grandad, "people pray when they are sad or sick or lonely, or have a problem too big to carry by themselves. They may say words they have learned from their fathers or mothers or their grandads or great-grandmothers. But often they must find their own words. The important thing to remember is that the words will always be right if they are real and true, and come from the heart."

We had walked far enough and Grandad said it was time to go back, but I had one last question.

"Are our prayers answered, Grandad?" I asked.

Grandad smiled. "Most prayers are not really questions," he said. "And if we listen very closely, a prayer is often its own answer. Like the trees and winds and waters, we pray because we are here - not to change the world, but to change ourselves. Because it is when we change ourselves ... that the world is changed."

My Grandad and I went for many walks after that one, and I often listened for the prayers of the earth, but was never sure I heard them.

Then one day, my Grandad was gone. And no matter how hard I prayed, he didn't come back. He couldn't come back.

I prayed and prayed until I couldn't pray anymore.

And so I didn't pray anymore. Not for a long, long time.

And the world seemed dark and lonely without my Grandad in it.

Until one day I went for a walk. I found a big rock under some tall trees and sat down on it. Overhead the branches swayed and a breeze whispered in the leaves. I heard a stream flowing nearby, and a robin singing from a honeysuckle bush.

And I heard something else too -

something in the sounds of breezes and birds and water. I heard prayers.

The earth was praying, just like my Grandad said it would.

So I joined in.

"Thank you," I prayed, "for tall trees and sweet flowers, for still rocks and singing birds, and especially... for my Grandad."

And as I prayed, something changed, and my Grandad seemed somehow near. And for the first time in a long time, the world seemed just right.

## **BELIEVE**

There is a God shaped hole in the heart of every human being. It is different in every human.

**If we really believe not only that God exists, but also that God is actively present in our lives - healing, teaching, and guiding - we need to set aside a time and a space to give the Lord our undivided attention.**

The natural world is in constant prayer. We need to pray for each other more often. We need to find special places and special moments when we remember that relationships are spiritual, and love can transcend every barrier if we will just let it.



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July 20, 2008**