

## Where are You?

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### Call to Worship

Come Holy Spirit! We worship by means of the Holy Spirit, we pray by means of the Holy Spirit (**The Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God (Romans 8:27)**), we read the word of God by the Spirit, and we hear God's message by the Spirit's gift on those preach and teach. Come Holy Spirit!

### Prayer

Father, open my heart to what your Spirit is teaching me today. Open my eyes to see both your rebuke and correction, your affirmation and glory. Open my mouth to speak praise to your name, and to declare your glory to others. Holy Spirit, come and fill me now.

This I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen

Song: "Open the Eyes of my Heart, Lord" (Paul Joseph Baloche)

*Open the eyes of heart Lord, open the eyes of my heart.*

*I want to see you. I want to see you.*

*Open the eyes of heart Lord, open the eyes of my heart.*

*I want to see you. I want to see you.*

To see you high and lifted up, shining in the light of your glory.

Pour out your power and love, as we sing Holy, Holy, Holy.

#### *Refrain*

Holy, Holy, Holy.

Holy, Holy, Holy.

I want to see you.

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### Prayer of Intercession

Father God, I grieve with Christians in Africa in the wake of Islamist attacks on schools, churches, homes, and farms. I pray for those from the school attacked with the loss of many lives in Uganda, for those mourning the deaths of 1500 Christians in Nigeria in the last 18 months, and for those who have lost loved ones in Mozambique. I pray with those persecuted Christians as they face the brutality and the mockery of their attackers and pray that their faith in the God who has already won the victory, the God who will not be mocked, will not waver.

I pray for myself, and my church, as sometimes we may face mockery for our faith. Strengthen our faith in you, give us the courage of our persecuted brothers and sisters. Forgive me Lord when I have complained because I "don't have enough". Give me the resilience of my persecuted brothers and sisters.

Lord, I pray for those in my church who face long-term illness, disability, mobility issues, even death. Give them the assurance of our persecuted brothers

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and sisters, that you are with them, that even “as they walk through the darkest valley” they will fear no evil for you are with them.

Lord, hear my prayer, in Jesus’ name. Amen

### Bible Reading: Genesis 3:1-10

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”. The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

“You will certainly not die”, the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some of it and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then their eyes were opened, and they realised they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees in the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

### Song: AHB 189 “We have a Gospel” (Edward Joseph Burns)

1. We have a gospel to proclaim, good news for men in all the earth;  
The gospel of a Saviour’s name: we sing his glory, tell his worth.
2. Tell of his birth at Bethlehem not in a royal house or hall  
But in a stable dark and dim, the Word made flesh, a light for all.
3. Tell of his death at Calvary, hated by those he came to save,  
In lonely suffering on the cross, for all he loved his life he gave.
4. Tell of that glorious Easter morn; empty the tomb, for he was free:  
He broke the power of death and hell that we might share his victory.
5. Tell of his reign at God’s right hand, by all creation glorified.  
He send his Spirit on his church to live for him, the Lamb who died.
6. Now we rejoice to name him King: Jesus is Lord of all the earth.  
This gospel-message we proclaim: we sing his glory, tell his worth.

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### Message: “Where are You?”

“Where are you?” That’s God calling – as he did in the earliest pages of the Scriptures. God completed a perfect creation; all was as it was meant to be. It worked perfectly and

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he was pleased with it. The stars and planets in their place, the land, sea, plants, and animals in perfect harmony. And so it was with the crowning glory of his creation – man and woman, created in order that he would have close fellowship with them. And what a fellowship it was. Can you imagine what it was like to live in the perfect garden of Eden and God the Creator comes to walk and talk with you there. Adam and Eve into whom God had breathed life have uninhibited and unrestrained conversation with God – what joy that must have been.

Then comes a conversation with the snake whose comments and sneaky, misleading, and subtle questions drove a wedge into their relationship with God and each other. They succumbed to the temptation of being like God, of elevating themselves above their created state, of being in possession of knowledge of what was good and evil. And the consequences were horrendous. They felt they were no longer comfortable in God's presence, experienced shame for the first time, and felt the need to cover their nakedness – no doubt spiritually as well as physically. And the serpent was again subject to judgement and defeat from the sovereign God and condemned to metaphorically “crawling about in the dust” (ever wondered how he got about before?!).

And into this state of changed relationships, God walks in the garden and asks of Adam and Eve, “Where are you?”. The answer is “hiding, afraid, and lost”. Several years ago in my country school, the afternoon ritual of kids lining up and boarding the buses was taking place. The buses all trundled off, but one stopped outside the school gate with one of the kids running back to say that a 5- or 6-year-old, wasn't on the bus. A search was launched, and he was eventually found curled up under a bush in the school yard. He had apparently come to the bus bay a bit late, saw the buses leaving, and was so frightened and scared that he hid – a primeval reaction to fear. Adam and Eve were in a similar state before a righteous God. They were banished from the garden; the perfection of the creation was destroyed – a physical and spiritual consequence we have inherited to this day.

We know that God had the ultimate plan that would redeem and restore the creation, Adam and Eve, and all their progeny, including us. So, when would he choose to put that plan into action? Certainly, it was to be in his perfect timing. In the meantime, there were some measures in place, including the Law which continually reminded his people of their departure from their close relationship with God, and in a sense, another asking of “Where are you?” God gave them a series of sacrifices and celebrations to restore their relationship with him and to be thankful for his provision and care.

Ultimately of course it was and is Jesus whose death on the cross and victory over death completely and finally restores our relationship with the Father, and completely removes the separation of disobedience and sin in which we have been complicit with Adam and Eve.

Just as he did in the garden of Eden, God continues to ask us, “Where are you?” He has given us his Son, Jesus. He has given us the simplest yet hardest way to salvation – hard because we have to give up our own attempts to rescue ourselves or to make ourselves better and acceptable. Hard because we must throw ourselves on his love and mercy, to ask forgiveness for our sin and waywardness, to submit our lives to his lordship – simple

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because our salvation was done for us, but hard because of our pride.

God's question is out there all the time. "Where are you?" So how do those outside his Kingdom hear it? It must be through us who call ourselves Christian. It must be us who heed his command in Matthew 28 – **Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.** We need to go into the world and explain the way of salvation, to introduce Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And that means a personal commitment, and our church's commitment to be connected to, to relate to, to make friends of, to reach out to those who need the Good News about the answer to "Where are you?"

I recently heard of a church running an Alpha Course. The leader gathered a team around her and declared that the course would be "run by the book". The dates were fixed, the church informed, meals for each week planned. Week after week the course was run, the meal was served, the video shown, and each week after the video the leader presented a Bible message to back up the video (for those who know Alpha that last bit is not "by the book"! ). The only problem was that no-one apart from the team turned up!! You can't ask people to consider God's question, "Where are you?", if there is no-one there to listen.

Churches are not to hide in, but to prepare us for outreach. Above the door to our church, right next to the EXIT sign, there is a sign "ENTRANCE – to the world" to remind us that the gospel we know is not just for us, but is Good News for the whole world, and it is our God-given mission to take it to the world. Churches that have no theology of sharing the Good News are dying all over the world - churches that are thriving are those who have a passion to share their faith, who share a message of hope and who work together as the Body of Christ using Holy Spirit gifts to encourage and support each other.

So, the question "Where are you?" is for those who are hiding from, those who are rejecting, and those who have never heard of God. But it is also a good question for us. A bit like Adam and Eve we have enjoyed a close relationship with God when and since we became Christians, when we confessed our sin and received forgiveness, when we were filled with the Holy Spirit and started our journey of discipleship. But that journey is not on an easy wide road where anything is allowed, where the bumps are flattened and the hills not too steep. Matthew 7:13-14 – "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it."

So, travelling that narrow road with all its challenges means that it is sometimes easy to get off it. We may not be far off it but God's question to Adam resonates with us when we do get off track – "Where are you?" If we become blind to the needs around us, if we can't see those close to us hurting, if we've let reading God's word and time in prayer slip, if we've fallen back into old habits or "addictions", then we need to heed God's question to us – "Where are you?"

Listen to God's voice as you pray and as you read his word. Listen to God's voice from your brothers and sisters in Christ. Listen to God's voice as you struggle with temptation. Somewhere in there you might hear him say, "Where are you?"

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Song: "Jesus Saves" (Priscilla Jane Owens)

1. We have heard a joyful sound: Jesus saves!  
Spread the gladness all around: Jesus saves!  
Bear the news to ever land, Climb the steeps and cross the waves;  
Onward! 'tis our Lord's command: Jesus saves!
2. Sing above the battle's strife: Jesus saves!  
By his death and endless life, Jesus saves!  
Sing it softly through the gloom, when the heart for mercy craves;  
Sing in triumph o'er the tomb: Jesus saves!
3. Give the winds a mighty voice: Jesus saves!  
Let the nations now rejoice: Jesus saves!  
Shout salvation full and free to every strand that ocean laves -  
This our song of victory: Jesus saves!

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### Benediction

We rise from worship and encounter the world. May the Holy Spirit fill us for all that we face and give us the words to say. "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." (Galatians 5:25)

Through the love of God, by the grace of the Lord Jesus, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Amen

This service was prepared by Ron Tiller, HopeNet SA