

**Circuit Service for 30<sup>th</sup> August 2020 - “God be in my head” prepared by Revd. Alison Parker**

**Call to Worship** As we gather we remember this reassurance from 1 Peter 2: 9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

**Welcome**

Many people have said that we are all in the same storm but we are not in the same boat. This seems to me to be even more true now than at the beginning of the Covid crisis.

Some of you have not left your homes for months and may be reading this quietly. If you feel alone I invite you to think of the faces of beloved friends you were accustomed to sharing in worship with. Or maybe friends who you had from way back who have moved away. Maybe call them and agree to pray through this service at the same time. Know that this service goes to very many people and that others access it online. We are still the body of Christ.

You may be getting caught up in the complexities of a return to more contact with others, perhaps knowing you may soon be in a church building. You know things will be different as we wear masks and cannot sing. I pray you will have peace. As we become busier may we remember that our God is in control and is worthy of our worship. We are still the body of Christ.

This service arises out of almost 50 years of praying the Sarum Prayer – God be in my Head. I vividly remember singing it for the last time at school. I cried then, not just because I was leaving that place and all those wonderful people, but because I felt I would never again hear that hymn sung that way. I felt I would never pray that prayer in such a beautiful way again. In one way I was right, musically nothing has ever equalled the experience of 650 voices being raised in song together, unaccompanied, singing something they knew well. In other ways I was wrong because most girls there were simply singing and not praying and the experience of praying this prayer over decades has massively deepened my relationship with God. It has been a daily companion for me in recent months so to pray it today is just as special as it was to sing it then.

As I become a supernumerary minister I have become more reflective and grateful for such soul food. I offer this service knowing that I do not expect to be in a pulpit for six months. I will still hold you in my heart and in my prayers but much more than that our loving God, that you invite to be with you as you pray this prayer, will guide and guard you. My heartfelt expectation is that you will be blessed and sustained in your life with God.

**Now we still ourselves and remember we are in the presence of our ever-loving God.**

If you are at home without internet sing or pray H & P 694

God be in my head, and in my understanding;  
God be in mine eyes, and in my looking;  
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;  
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;  
God be at mine end, and at my departing.

Otherwise here is a link to an audio file of friend of mine from school singing and praying God be in my Head. Rebecca says all may use it freely.

[https://youtu.be/uyWyF2ppB\\_Y](https://youtu.be/uyWyF2ppB_Y)

## **Some words about the Sarum Prayer**

What is there to commend this prayer?

It is short, shorter than the Lord's Prayer – only five lines yet it expresses so much

It is old and has remained as a treasured prayer since 1558. We can trust it for it has guided many before us. As we look back to former times we see God and our relationship with him in different ways as we grasp for example that we can think with our hearts.

It is physical – working its way down our body, which makes it memorable too.

It is genderless – Just God

It is mystical as it is focused on the God who dwells within us.

This prayer is fruit for years of different reflections. We will only skim the surface today. I have been reading a book by Ken Wilson who takes 40 days just to reflect on this prayer. It is a rich source of inspiration. I have included details at the end of this service.

Let's take the prayer line by line now. These are just a few of my thoughts inspired by this prayer I would love to hear yours. My thoughts are combined with scripture and hymns and prayers. You could allow your mind to dwell on the scripture and hymns that the Sarum prayer brings to mind for you.

## **God be in my head and in my understanding**

When we think about these words it can be easy for us to neglect the spirit at the heart of this prayer.

In part this because the word "understanding" has gained extra meanings over the years but some of the original still remains.

For today think about understanding in terms of relationships and people. If you feel someone understands you, you do not just mean that they know all the facts about you; it is deeper than that. If you feel understood you feel listened to, you feel they are open to all you are and able to appreciate all the different, perhaps complicated ways you think, feel and behave. Someone who understands you and your motivations is in a better position to forgive your mistakes and help you move on. Someone who understands you can be open to the wonder of you! God understands you in just such a way.

So perhaps understanding is much more about openness than it is about learning facts. It is not about mastery of something it is about staying receptive and flexible in our thinking.

Then let us consider the word "under" as part of understanding. Surely a mastery of anything would be an over-standing? "Under" though used to mean something different it was closer to "among". So it may be that with God right there in our head we can truly be amongst other people, alongside them. Perhaps we can be closer to God's way of understanding and loving us this way in our relationships with others.

This reading reminds us that we are reliant on God for insight and wisdom in all we are and do.

## **Proverbs 3:5-6**

### **Prayer of adoration**

Pray this beautiful prayer by John Birch slowly

Creator of all,  
Sustainer of all,  
Saviour of all,  
Your glory and majesty  
are beyond our understanding,  
Your power too awesome to behold.  
And yet your love enfolds us as a gentle breeze.  
Saviour of all ,  
Sustainer of all,  
Creator of all,  
We bless your holy name. Amen

The more I learn about God the more I am swept up and overwhelmed by his love expressed in so many ways. This hymn helps us express the scope of his power and his tenderness.

**Stf 103, or H&P 36 God is Love, let heaven adore him**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-tZq0zR8IE> This version has slightly different words but is beautiful.

1  
God is Love;  
let heaven adore him;  
God is Love;  
let earth rejoice;  
let creation sing before him,  
and exalt him with one voice.  
He who laid the earth's foundation,  
he who spread the heavens above,  
he who breathes through all creation,  
he is Love, eternal Love.

2  
God is Love;  
and he, enfolding  
all the world in one embrace,  
with unfailing grasp is holding  
every child of every race.  
And when human hearts are breaking  
under sorrow's iron rod,  
then they find that selfsame aching  
deep within the heart of God.

3  
God is Love;  
and though with blindness  
sin afflicts each human soul,  
God's eternal loving-kindness  
holds and guides and keeps them whole.  
Sin and death and hell shall never  
o'er us final triumph gain;  
God is Love, so Love for ever  
o'er the universe must reign.

Timothy Rees  
(1874–1939)  
(alt.)

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**God be in mine eyes and in my looking**

This reminds us that we cannot always see God amongst us so to pray for him to be in our looking is a deeply appropriate prayer.  
Luke 24:30-32

There is a problem with asking God to be in our eyes. If our vision or our looking is really submitted to God we will probably see things we would rather not see.

There is great beauty in this world but there is also much that must sadden God. There is brokenness and selfishness and conflict. All this is hard to see, we would rather shut our eyes and perhaps our ears too. If we are honest there are situations where we can see God working but we are reluctant to join in. Perhaps we can also see him working to transform us but we are scared to leave our comfort zone.

It is only when we allow God to help us see clearly that we can see the beauty in the ugliness and sense what he is calling us into. Bread has to be broken for us to see God! Perhaps our perceptions and certainties need to be broken to for our vision to clear.

The beautiful hymn that Charles Wesley wrote about opening our inward ear deserves to be better known and I think could also apply to our inward, godly sight.

Sing or speak this hymn as a prayer as you offer all of yourself and your brokenness to God again. It has a beautiful last verse which reminds us that God canst make us understand which echoes the first line of our prayer too.

### **StF 450 , H&P 540 Open Lord my inward ear**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBS4yAGXp\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBS4yAGXp_U) first two verses only

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhEFM1OACGA> Very close to H&P version

1

Open, Lord, my inward ear,  
and bid my heart rejoice;  
bid my quiet spirit hear  
your comfortable voice;  
never in the whirlwind found,  
or where earthquakes rock the place,  
still and silent is the sound,  
the whisper of your grace.

2

From the world of sin, and noise,  
and hurry I withdraw;  
for the small and inward voice  
I wait with humble awe  
silent am I now and still,  
dare not in your presence move;  
to my waiting soul reveal  
the secret of your love.

3

You did undertake for me,  
for me to death were sold;  
wisdom in a mystery  
of bleeding love unfold;  
teach the lesson of your cross;  
let me die, with you to reign;  
all things let me count but loss,  
so I may you regain.

4

Show me, as my soul can bear,  
the depth of inbred sin;  
all the unbelief declare,  
the pride that lurks within;  
take me, whom yourself have bought,  
bring into captivity  
every high aspiring thought  
and give humility.

5

Lord, my time is in your hand,  
my soul to you convert;  
you can make me understand,  
though I am slow of heart;  
yours in whom I live and move,  
yours the work, your name divine;  
you are wisdom, power, and love,  
and all you are is mine.

Charles Wesley  
(1707–1788)

**A prayer of confession and petition by John Birch again.**

God of healing,  
God of wholeness,  
we bring our brokenness,  
our sinfulness,  
our fears  
and despair,  
and lay them at your feet.

God of healing,  
God of wholeness,  
we hold out hearts and hands,  
minds and souls  
to feel your touch,  
and know the peace  
that only you can bring.

God of healing,  
God of wholeness,  
this precious moment  
in your presence and power  
grant us faith and confidence  
that here broken lives  
are made whole.

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**God be in my mouth and in my speaking**

Our words are completely inadequate when it comes to talking to God or talking about him.

That does not mean we should not try though. Think about waiting for a small child to learn to speak. Even when they cannot form words properly you listen with attentiveness and joy still. I think God attends to our attempts to praise him with equal joy and attentiveness.

Think about words that help you understand what God is like, words you could use to praise him. If you are with others you could share some of these thoughts but to help you out let's use some words from the bible first.

Here are the words from **Psalm 145 ( Stf 836, H&P 884 )** for us to meditate upon. If you are with others you could say these responsively or together.

**If you are with others share words to describe God that are meaningful for you. If you are on your own try to come up with a new word for God for every day of this week.**

<p>Psalm 145</p> <p>1 I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name for ever and ever.</p> <p>2 Every day I will bless you, and praise your name for ever and ever.</p> <p>3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.</p> <p>4 One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.</p> <p>5 On the glorious splendour of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.</p> <p>6 The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness.</p> <p>7 They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.</p> <p>8 The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.</p> <p>9 The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.</p> <p>10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you.</p> <p>11 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power,</p>	<p>12 to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.</p> <p>13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.</p> <p>The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.</p> <p>14 The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.</p> <p>15 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.</p> <p>16 You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.</p> <p>17 The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings.</p> <p>18 The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.</p> <p>19 He fulfils the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them.</p> <p>20 The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.</p> <p>21 My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh will bless his holy name for ever and ever.</p> <p>From The New Revised Standard Version</p>
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### **God be in my heart and in my thinking**

This is a beautiful promise from God. **Ezekiel 36:26 – 28**

These are my favourite words from the book of Ezekiel. They come in the chapter before the Spirit of God clothes the dry bones with flesh. In chapter 37 we get this vision of a tremendous gathering of people brought back to life, from their skeletal state, and ready for action. No action comes from the right place though unless God has transformed your heart by dwelling there. This is why these verses from chapter 36 speak so powerfully to me.

This for me is what is meant by God be in my Heart and in my thinking. Why thinking though, why isn't it feeling? Perhaps it is because the sense of God indwelling us and moving us to act with

compassion needs to come from the very core of us. For our loving to be godly and genuine it needs to come from our heart. Our knowledge of God needs not just to be a thing of reason, a matter of the mind. It needs to shift down so our hearts beat with the beat of God's love.

This beautiful hymn talks about the God of our heart

### **Stf 545, H & P 378 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9cuRc1RMb>

1  
Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;  
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,  
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

2  
Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,  
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;  
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;  
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

3  
Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;  
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;  
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong  
tower;  
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my  
power.

4  
Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise;  
be thou mine inheritance now and always;  
be thou and thou only the first in my heart,  
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

5  
High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,  
O grant me its joys after victory is won;  
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish, 8th century

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### **God be at mine end and at my departing**

**John 3: 1 – 17**

Striving for the vision – God always

This passage is very special because here we see Jesus explaining to Nicodemus not just who he is but why who he is crucial! I was going to just include the final verses as they are those that deal with our earthly end and departing. I chose to include the whole encounter because I think Jesus is saying to Nicodemus this is where it starts with you and me if you accept my words. More than that Jesus says this is where it ends too. This promise is for you not just at your departing but today and always. Jesus is inviting Nicodemus on a journey with him, in life and in death. He is showing Nicodemus that he is central and always will be. He promises the same to you.

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### **Prayers of intercession**

<https://bryonytaylor.com/2012/02/20/intercessions-based-around-the-sarum-primer-god-be-in-my-head-prayer/>

These prayers come from a lady called Briony Taylor- she takes a different approach to many of the sentences of the prayer to the one I have taken. That is why I wanted to include them. On her blog Briony indicates that her prayers can be freely adapted and used.

**God be in my head  
and in my understanding;**

Father, our minds are constantly fed from newspapers, tv and conversations with others. Help us to filter what we read about and what we hear to discern what you might be saying. Renew our minds and give us wisdom. Help us be more concerned to understand than be understood. Help us to bring your wisdom to bear in our conversations and dealings with others. Help us as we interpret the times we are living in. We pray for all those involved in leadership in our communities and in governments around the world. Give wisdom and understanding to all those involved in decision making – especially in those situations which will impact the most on the poor and the weak.

**God be in my eyes  
and in my looking;**

Father, as we look around us we see all sorts of things, our senses are assaulted with so many images every day. Thank you for those things we see that bring us joy – like the first flowers of spring or the sunshine in the early morning or the birth of a baby. Help us to look at the world through your eyes. Show us the things we need to see. Show us the people and situations that need your help and prompt us to help if we can. Let our eyes be your eyes.

**God be in my mouth  
and in my speaking;**

Jesus, thank you that you choose to use us to reach the world with your love. Help us when we speak to speak words that build up and don't tear down. Guide us to think before we speak and consider our words carefully. We pray for all those who have been hurt by something someone has said to them – these wounds can often be more painful than physical wounds. We pray for healing where words have hurt and we ask forgiveness for the times when we have said the wrong thing. Thank you for the words of love you speak to us. Speak through us, Lord we pray, that people might know your love in their lives.

**God be in my heart  
and in my thinking;**

Lord, lots of things dominate our thoughts. Many of these things are the worries we have for friends or family. We lift to you now those people and situations that are on our minds. We invite you to intervene in these situations. Help us to trust that you hear our prayers. Lift the burdens we are carrying in our hearts and help us to know that your burden is light. Help us to let go of our anxieties and hand over our lives to your control.

**God be at my end  
and in my departing**

Father, we pray for all those coming to an ending. For those who are coming to the end of their lives – we pray for their carers and families. We pray for those who are finishing a project, or coming to the end of a job and for those preparing for retirement. Be with us in our endings and remind us that each day is a new beginning with you. **Amen**



## Lord's Prayer

This final repetition of the Sarum Prayer is one I would like you to sing or listen to or hear in your head and imagination with many voices blending together. This prayer is a prayer for an individual to pray but there is something deeply special when we pray it together.

### H & P 694 – God be in my head

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQ5GF3gVlbc> has many voices singing together in a simple prayerful way

God be in my head, and in my understanding;  
God be in mine eyes, and in my looking;  
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;  
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;  
God be at mine end, and at my departing.

Anon.

### **Blessing**

Know that by the power of the Holy Spirit  
God is in your head and in your understanding  
God is in your eyes and in your looking  
God is in your mouth and in your speaking  
God is in your heart and in your thinking  
God is in your end and at your departing.

Here is the link for the book by Ken Wilson. I have some copies of this available if people would like to borrow them.

God be in my Head *The Sarum Prayer* published by [www.churchpublishing.org/godbeinmyhead](http://www.churchpublishing.org/godbeinmyhead)

In the UK it is in stock at Eden.

<https://www.eden.co.uk/god-be-in-my-head-the-sarum-prayer/>