

LECTIO 365

is a daily devotional resource that helps you pray the Bible every day.

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Written by leaders from the 24-7 Prayer movement, and produced in partnership with CWR, this resource helps you engage with Scripture to inspire prayer and shape your life.

Journey through the year with Pete Greig, Carla Harding, Phil Togwell, Jill Weber and international guest writers.

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In order to listen and read at the same time, you need to download the day page then click the date and set your screen for two separate windows

August 2020

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Audio for Each Day in MP3 Format

[Month of August 2020](#)

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August 01 2020 (click for audio)

Strengthen Our Hearts

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Father God, open my eyes, stir my heart and teach me how, 'To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with...' You today (Micah 6:8).

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's greatness today, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 34...

I will praise the LORD at all times.

I will constantly speak his praises.

I will boast only in the LORD;

let all who are helpless take heart.

Come, let us tell of the LORD's greatness;

let us exalt his name together.

Psalms 34:1-3

Pause and pray

It's comforting to know that we are seen and understood by our God. He knows our weaknesses better than we know ourselves. Today I reflect on Luke 18. Here Jesus, understanding how easily we can lose heart, tells His disciples a parable that will help them persist in the place of prayer.

He said: 'In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, "Grant me justice against my adversary."

'For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, "Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!"'

And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?'

Luke 18:2-8

On Sunday, 23rd of February of this year, a young black man went out for a jog in his neighborhood. He never came home. Ahmaud was shot and killed by two white men. When I heard about Ahmaud Arbery's death, my first reaction was, *The killers are probably going to get off scot-free. There's no justice. Never has been.* It exposed, in my heart, how tired I was of the narrative. News report after news report. Young black men being shot. Again. Perpetrators getting off scot-free. Again. Same story. What was the point of crying out? I lost heart.

Ask

Father, I ask that You would show me where I have become jaded by the seemingly unanswered cries for justice I hear around me. Show me where I have lost heart and given up on seeing justice come, either quickly or at all.

Pause and pray

Father, I pray for all those working for racial reconciliation. Would You help them not lose heart? Give them perseverance, resilience and fill their hearts with faith in a God who makes all wrong things right? In the quiet, I hold before You specific names of those I know who are laboring for justice.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

He said: 'In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, "Grant me justice against my adversary."

'For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, "Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!"'

And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?'

Luke 18:2–8

God is not an unjust judge.

My ability to not lose heart in my continual cry for justice is fueled by knowing the heart of God. He is the God who hears my voice. He will not put me off. He will see to it Himself that justice comes quickly.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Father, I give You my discouragement and despair. I take hold of faith and I receive hope again. I believe You are working justice, and I ask You to show me how to partner with You.

Yielding Promise

Today, I stand on God's promise in Psalm 91:15, when You say to the psalmist, 'He will call on me, and I will answer him'.

Thank You that You answer the cry for justice.

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.

Amen.

August 02 2020 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Prayer

I've been thinking this week about racial justice and reconciliation. It's easy to feel relentlessly responsible for tackling all the world's insurmountable problems. But today I pause and receive again God's grace and mercy. 'Come, all you who are thirsty,' He says, 'come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!' (Isa. 55:1).

Pause and pray

Are you tired?' asks Jesus. 'Are you worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.'

Pause and pray

Sabbath,' says the theologian Walter Brueggemann, 'is the refusal to let one's life be defined by production and consumption and the endless pursuit of private well-being.' *

Lord, I come to You for a deep rest today. I spend so much of my life dissatisfied: wanting more stuff, more money, more friends, more applause, more miracles. Today, I put away my superhero cape and thank You, very simply, that because I have You, I have everything I will ever truly need.

I take a moment now to pray for those who really don't have enough. Is there a particular person I know, or crises elsewhere in the world, where God's justice and mercy are desperately needed today?

* Walter Brueggemann, Sabbath as Resistance, p.6

Pause and pray

I recommit myself to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the coming week:

Spirit of the Sovereign Lord,. anoint me again this week to proclaim good news to the poor. Send me out again this week to bind up the broken-hearted. Help me again this week to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners. Amen.

Pause and pray

Sabbath blessing

May this day bring sabbath rest to my heart and my home.

May God's image in me be restored, and my imagination in God be re-storied.

May the gravity of material things be lightened, and the relativity of time slow down.

May I know grace to embrace my own finite smallness in the arms of God's infinite greatness.

*May God's Word feed me and His Spirit lead me into the week and into the life to come.**

*Sabbath Blessing by Pete Greig, petegreig.info

August 3 2020 (click for audio)

Space for God

Each week we will explore how characters, encounters with God and laws in the Old Testament relate to the six practices at the heart of *Lectio 365*: prayer, mission, justice, creativity, hospitality and learning. We'll use these to examine our own lives and be inspired to love God, love others and love the world.

This week we will be starting a week of exploration of the biblical practice of hospitality.

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Oh God of welcome, You invite me into Your family. Today I sit at Your table. I savor Your word to me. May I receive all the nourishment You have for me today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's care, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 71...

O Lord, you alone are my hope. I've trusted you, O LORD, from childhood. Yes, you have been with me from birth; from my mother's womb you have cared for me. No wonder I am always praising you!

Psalm 71:5–6

Pause and pray

Ancient near-eastern culture placed a high value on hospitality. Guests, whether friend or stranger, were treated with great honor, offered refuge and safety, and given the best seat in the house. Let's join the Old Testament patriarch Abraham as he receives some unusual guests...

The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

He said, 'If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way – now that you have come to your servant.'

'Very well,' they answered, 'do as you say.'

Genesis 18:1–5

In the story we find Abraham sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. As soon as visitors came into view he swings into action. His life contains space and time not only to re-

ceive but also to respond to the unexpected – his home and his heart are like a hotel with a ‘vacancy’ sign out front.

Ask

I take a moment and mentally review my upcoming week.

Is my calendar crammed full or do I have room to receive those who might unexpectedly come my way? Do I have the mental and emotional capacity to respond to unexpected interruptions? Or does my heart and my home have a ‘no vacancy’ sign out front?

Pause and pray

God, I pray for my church. In the busyness of our schedules, I ask for the gift of space – both mental and emotional space, but also space in our dairies. May we have capacity to receive and respond to those you might send our way.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

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‘Very well,’ they answered, ‘do as you say.’

Genesis 18:1–5

There appears to be some lack of clarity (perhaps intentionally by the author) as to whether the guests are human or divine. It says in the beginning of the story, ‘The LORD appeared to Abraham’, and then goes on to refer to ‘the three men’.

Does God come to me in disguise? How might moments of human hospitality become moments of divine encounter?

Pause and pray

Prayer of Yielding

Jesus, I yield my head and heart space to You today. I make room for You and welcome You. Help me to see You in those who come my way, may I receive them as I would receive You, and may I respond with generous hospitality.

Yielding Promise

Jesus, I praise You for Your promise that when I seek You, I will find You and when I knock, You will answer (Matt. 7:7–8).

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.*

*Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.*

*Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.*

Amen.

August 4 2020 (click for audio)

Risk and Reward

Together we will pray (**P.R.A.Y.**), very simply we will – ‘**P**’: PAUSE to be still. ‘**R**’: REJOICE with a Psalm and REFLECT on a scripture relating to hospitality. ‘**A**’: ASK God to help us and others and ‘**Y**’: YIELD to His will in our lives, come what may.

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Oh God of welcome, You invite me into Your family. Today I sit at Your table. I savor Your word to me. May I receive all the nourishment You have for me today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's power, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 77...

O God, your ways are holy. Is there any god as mighty as you? You are the God of great wonders! You demonstrate your awesome power among the nations

Psalm 77:13–14

Pause and pray

Today I reflect on the story of Joshua's spies and Rahab. It is a fascinating study of risk and reward in hospitality. As I read the story, I pay attention to the possible risks and the possible rewards...

Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. 'Go, look over the land,' he said, 'especially Jericho.' So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.

The king of Jericho was told, 'Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.' So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: 'Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land.'

But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, 'Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them.' (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

Joshua 2:1–7

This act of hospitality entailed risk for everyone involved. Rahab was a prostitute and a Gentile. Going into her home would cause the spies to become ritually unclean. Would she be trustwor-

thy, or would she hand them over to the authorities? For Rahab, the spies were the enemy. Was it safe to invite them into her home?

Ask

How recently have I stepped out of my comfort zone, and either offered or received hospitality from those who are different to me? Perhaps those of a different socio-economic bracket, a different faith or race. Even those who cheer for different football teams!

God, give me the courage to take risks in hospitality. Challenge me to expand my circle of those I would normally call 'my people'.

Pause and pray

I ask You, God, would You give Your Church courage, and increase our capacity to receive and protect the stranger. Help us to take risks and enlarge our lives to make space for others – the ones who are not like us.

Pause and pray

Yield

Everyone else in Jericho saw the strangers as a threat, but Rahab saw them as a gift, as an opportunity. She had eyes to see the salvation that was coming her way. As I read the passage again, I put myself in Rahab's position and see the story through her eyes.

Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. 'Go, look over the land,' he said, 'especially Jericho.' So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.

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Joshua 2:1–7

Later in the chapter, we see Rahab asking the spies to show her kindness and spare her family in exchange for the hospitality she has shown them. 'Our lives for your lives!' (Josh. 2:14), the men assure her. Rahab chooses solidarity with the strangers, and, as a result, she and her family are spared when the city is conquered.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, help me to see when salvation and help comes from unlikely places and individuals. When I have the opportunity to take risks, I give You my fears and apprehensions, and receive from You the unexpected rewards and blessings You send my way.

Yielding Promise

Father, I thank You for Your challenge to take more risks and to be courageous, and for Your promise to Joshua, and to me, that 'the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go' (Josh. 1:9).

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.
Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.
Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.
Amen.*

August 5 2020 (click for audio)

Who Are My People

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Oh God of welcome, You invite me into Your family. Today I sit at Your table. I savor Your word to me. May I receive all the nourishment You have for me today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's goodness, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 84...

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of Heaven's Armies.
I long, yes, I faint with longing
to enter the courts of the LORD.
With my whole being, body and soul,
I will shout joyfully to the living God.
Psalm 84:1–2*

Pause and pray

Today I reflect on the story of Ruth, who is a Gentile and daughter of the widow Naomi. As she tries to find a way to provide for herself and her family, she asks if she might glean leftover grain from the field of a man called Boaz.

*Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, 'Who does that young woman belong to?'
The overseer replied, 'She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, "Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters." She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.'
So Boaz said to Ruth, 'My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.'
Ruth 2:5–9*

In tribal cultures, the question 'Who are her people?' is an important and common question. People are identified by their relational connections, their people. Sometimes those on the margins are distinguished by their lack of connections – whether they be to work, home or relationships.

Ask

I reflect on who I belong to. Who are my people? What are the relational connections that surround and support me? In the quiet I name them before You, God, and I thank You for them.

Pause and pray

God, I think of those in the world who have no answer to the question: 'Who are their people?' Orphans. The bereaved. Refugees. Those imprisoned and those who have lost loved ones due to illness, addiction and family breakdown. Maybe that's me too? God would You put the lonely in families?

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

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So Boaz said to Ruth, 'My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.'

Ruth 2:5–9

Boaz responds to Ruth's need with simple hospitality. Safety. Company with the women who work with him. A simple drink of water.

Hospitality need not be complicated. Simple acts of welcome and sharing can open up the way for meaningful connection. In Boaz's life, it got him a wife!

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, I choose to not use up all my resources for myself, but to leave some around the edges of my life to share with those in need. Show me how to extend simple acts of kindness, welcome and connection.

Yielding Promise

Lord, I thank You for Your promise in Luke 6:38: 'Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.' I will have all I need to share!

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say. Amen.

August 6 2020 (click for audio)
A Home For All

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Oh God of welcome, You invite me into Your family. Today I sit at Your table. I savor Your word to me. May I receive all the nourishment You have for me today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's faithfulness and unending love, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 89...

I will sing of the LORD's unfailing love forever! Young and old will hear of your faithfulness. Your unfailing love will last forever. Your faithfulness is as enduring as the heavens.

Psalm 89:1–2

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the book of Leviticus, where the Lord instructs Moses to speak to the people on his behalf. 'Be holy because I... am holy' (Lev. 19:1), God says, and then goes on to list the marks of a people that are holy, that are set apart for Him and His purposes. Among this list is some instruction regarding hospitality...

When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not ill-treat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 19:33–34

My husband and I lived in a Christian community house for many years, opening up our home to friends and strangers. One day, one of our frequent guests invited a new friend over to our home. 'Come back to my house,' she said. She knew that our house was her house, and that the hospitality that she received there she could then extend to others.

We were once strangers to God – enemies even – and He made us family. He created a place not only for us, but a place we could invite others into.

Ask

God, I was alienated from You. But I am an alien no longer – I am a citizen of Your kingdom and a beloved child in Your family. Thank You for my salvation -- for making space for me at Your table.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for my church, that we would freely, fearlessly and generously extend hospitality to others. I ask Your forgiveness for when we have not warmly welcomed the immigrant, the

refugee and those from other countries and other cultures. When we have not made space for them in our communities, our workplaces, our homes and our places of worship. Lord help us to receive them in the same way that You received us.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not ill-treat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 19:33–34

Treating foreigners – new arrivals, immigrants or refugees – as native born. Treating strangers as family. This is the mark of a holy people – a people set apart for God. As I try to practice this, I often meet resistance from within myself and from others. Racism. Cultural misunderstanding. Insecurity and fear. How might I overcome this resistance so that we can create a home for all?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I am eager to claim my place at Your table, but sometimes reticent to make room for another. Will there be enough? Will we get on well? God, I give my fears to You and I yield myself to Your inclusive ways.

Yielding Promise

God, I am so grateful for Your promise in 1 Peter 2:10: 'Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.' I belong to You now, and I have received mercy.

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.*

*Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.*

*Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.*

Amen.

August 7 2020 (click for audio)

Receiving Hospitality

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Oh God of welcome, You invite me into Your family. Today I sit at Your table. I savor Your word to me. May I receive all the nourishment You have for me today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's generosity, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 84...

A single day in your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else! I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God than live the good life in the homes of the wicked. For the LORD God is our sun and our shield. He gives us grace and glory. The Lord will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right.
Psalm 84:10–11

Pause and pray

Today I reflect on the story of the prophet Elijah. He has just emerged from a hiding place in the wilderness. God has told Elijah to go to Zarephath, saying that He would provide for him.

So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, 'Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?' As she was going to get it, he called, 'And bring me, please, a piece of bread.'

'As surely as the LORD your God lives,' she replied, 'I don't have any bread – only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it – and die.'

Elijah said to her, 'Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: "The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land."'

She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.

1 Kings 17:10–16

God had already spoken to Elijah about providing for him through a widow. Even so, asking her for water and bread must have been a vulnerable act. He let a stranger know he was in need and asked her for help.

Ask

Have there been times in my life where I have needed the support and hospitality of others?

How does it feel to tell people I need help? What prevents me from doing so?

God, I ask you to help me to not hide my vulnerability, but to take risks. What do I need today?

Who can I ask for help?

Pause and pray

God, I pray for my faith community, that we would be vulnerable with each other. Help us not hide our need but instead take risks and let others know when we need help.

Pause and pray

Yield

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She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.

1 Kings 17:10–16

Elijah and the widow have a moment of shared vulnerability – they both are in need. Elijah's pockets are empty but he carries with him a promise. The widow's cupboards were nearly bare, but she takes a step of risky obedience. She trusts in the word of the Lord from the mouth of a stranger. In the midst of shared need, vulnerability and risk, God provides.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I yield to you my instinct to keep my needs hidden and I choose moments of shared vulnerability. I ask for Your help to, as Brené Brown says, 'rumble with vulnerability'. I ask You for life, hope and provision into those moments.

Yielding Promise

Father, I let go of my fear and I take hold of Your promise in Isaiah 54:4: 'Do not be afraid; you will not be put to shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated.'

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.*

*Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.*

*Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.*

Amen.

*Brené Brown, Dare to Lead (Vermillion, London: 2018) p10

August 8 2020 (click for audio)

Dangerously Tired

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Oh God of welcome, You invite me into Your family. Today I sit at Your table. I savor Your word to me. May I receive all the nourishment You have for me today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's abundance, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 85...

*Unfailing love and truth have met together.
Righteousness and peace have kissed!
Truth springs up from the earth,
and righteousness smiles down from heaven.
Yes, the LORD pours down his blessings.
Our land will yield its bountiful harvest.
Psalm 85:10–12*

Pause and pray

Today I reflect again on the story of Elijah in another moment of vulnerability. He has had a great victory over the enemies of God, but his life is threatened and he flees into the wilderness. His emotional and physical resources are low, and he crashes.

*Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, LORD,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.
All at once an angel touched him and said, 'Get up and eat.' He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.
1 Kings 19:3–6*

Have I ever been so exhausted, so depleted that I've felt like I just can't go on? Has life been so overwhelming and my personal resources so meager that I've hit a wall and all I've wanted to do is lie down and fall asleep?

Ask

I take a moment in the quiet to take stock. Am I tired? Am I dangerously tired? In the midst of the highs and lows of life have I used up all my resources?

God, I ask for self-awareness, and for space, quiet and rest – deep rest.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for particular people in my life going through intense seasons. Seasons of great achievements and grand leaps forward. Seasons of opposition, loss and resistance. Would You help them to step back from the front lines of their lives and step into the quiet place where they can be still, rest and even sleep!

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, LORD,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, 'Get up and eat.' He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

1 Kings 19:3–6

Elijah receives hospitality from an unexpected source – an angel. 'Eat' the angel says and supplies him with a heaven-cooked meal (I wonder if it tasted like angel food cake?). Sorry, I couldn't resist! God's provision in that moment is surprisingly homely and practical. God is as interested in Elijah's physical needs as He is in his spiritual well being.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I thank You that You are so practical. You know what I need. God, I yield to Your care, Your concern over my life. I receive Your hospitality and the way You gently and practically attend to my needs, even when it comes from surprising places.

Yielding Promise

God, I thank You for Your promise in Psalm 55:22: 'Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.' You sustain me!

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.*

*Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.*

*Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.*

Amen.

August 9 2020 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Blessing

I've been thinking this week about the biblical priority of hospitality, and today I celebrate the greatest dinner invitation of all time: 'Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me' (Rev.3:20).

Pause and pray

Psalms 23 celebrates the good shepherd's hospitality in every season of life:

*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.
Psalm 23 (NIV)*

Pause and pray

Lord, thank You for leading me by quiet waters, for feeding me at Your table, and for inviting me to dwell in Your house forever. Would You please give me opportunities this week to show true hospitality to others, and to do it generously, joyfully and without grumbling. Would You give me grace to embrace interruptions as gifts from You, and Help me to make space in my schedule, at my table, in my home and my heart for others. Amen.

I pray today for the Church as it opens its doors to the world:

Father God, as millions of people gather in Your House to eat at Your table today, may we be a family defined by its kindness towards everyone.

Jesus, we pray for those who are lonely or on the margins today, and especially for those who are attending church for the first time, or the last time. May they find themselves noticed and loved. And for those who are nowhere near a church meeting today, send us out to bring the prodigals home.

Holy Spirit, revive Your church today. Form us into the most welcoming and diverse community on earth that the world may see Your love, believe in Your mercy and receive Your invitation home.

I take a moment now to earth these big prayers in my own local community, naming those I know who might otherwise find themselves forgotten or on the margins today.

Pause and pray

Sabbath blessing

May this day bring sabbath rest to my heart and my home.

May God's image in me be restored, and my imagination in God be re-storied.

May the gravity of material things be lightened, and the relativity of time slow down.

May I know grace to embrace my own finite smallness in the arms of God's infinite greatness.

*May God's Word feed me and His Spirit lead me into the week and into the life to come. **

**Sabbath Blessing by Pete Greig, petegreig.info*

August 10 2020 (click for audio)

If you've been using this app for any length of time, you'll know that there's a particular shape to the way we pray. Week by week we cycle systematically through six biblical priorities, derived from the Rule of *The Order of the Mustard Seed*. These are: prayer and creativity, justice and hospitality, learning and mission. This week our prayers will focus on the theme of justice in the Old Testament.

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of justice and mercy, I come before You now with an awareness of those whose prayers today are sighs, sobs or even screams for help. Soften my heart to care more keenly, sharpen my mind to think more clearly, and clench my fists to fight more fiercely for those who are oppressed. Amen.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in the way You champion and prioritize the vulnerable, joining in the ancient song of all God's people in the words of Psalm 10...

*The Lord is king forever and ever!
The godless nations will vanish from the land.
Lord, you know the hopes of the helpless.
Surely you will hear their cries and comfort them.
You will bring justice to the orphans and the oppressed,
so mere people can no longer terrify them
Psalm 10:16-18*

Pause and pray

Today's reading comes from the prophet Micah who lived seven centuries before Christ, at a time of great social injustice and dead religious observance...

*With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.
Micah 6:6-8*

I may not 'come before the Lord... with calves a year old', but there are other sacrifices that can certainly give me a false sense of spiritual superiority: attending church, giving money, and even having a quiet time like this. These things can, all too easily, numb me to the needs of the world. Some people think that all God ever says to us in times like these is 'I love you, I love you' but they're wrong. He is often challenging and disruptive: 'Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don't take yourself too seriously - take God seriously.' (Micah 6:8 – MSG)

Ask

Lord, it's easy to blame everyone else for the world's injustices but I know that I can be hard-hearted towards the needs of others. I hate human trafficking but then I buy cheap products made in sweat shops without checking their source, and I tolerate a culture that glamorizes porn. I claim to care about the poor but I don't know the names - or the needs - of some of the people in my own street. Forgive my hypocrisy. Break my heart with the things that break Yours.

Pause and pray

'So you say you love the poor?' says Father Gustavo Gutierrez, 'Then name them!' And so I take time now to name before the Lord those people known to me who are poor and afflicted in any way.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I notice the hints of Christ to come, embedded here in Micah's prophecy seven centuries before Jesus' birth...

With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow down before the exalted God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:6-8

'Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,' asks Micah, 'the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' He is denouncing the dead religion of bloody sacrifice, and yet unwittingly predicting that God the Father will indeed one day offer His firstborn son as a bloody sacrifice for our transgressions. Through Christ's cross, there is justice for the poor, forgiveness of sins, and mercy for us all.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God of Justice, I am sorry for the injustices I perpetrate when I am selfish in the ways I shop and vote and live my life, as if these things have nothing to do with the ways I pray and worship and go to church. Help me to act justly today.

God of mercy, I am sorry, too, for how harsh, merciless and callous my heart can sometimes be towards those who are messing up their lives, when You are always so merciful towards me when I mess up mine. Help me to love mercy today.

Humble God, I'm sorry for my sense of entitlement and the subtle ways I look down on certain types of people (even though I pretend not to). Teach me to walk humbly, honestly and vulnerably with You today.

Yielding Promise

Finally, I yield to Your mercy, remembering that it is 'Because of the Lord's great love [that] we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.' (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say. Amen.

August 11 2020 Beautiful Waste (click for audio)

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of justice and mercy, I come before You now with an awareness of those whose prayers today are sighs, sobs or even screams for help. Soften my heart to care more keenly, sharpen my mind to think more clearly, and clench my fists to fight more fiercely for those who are oppressed. Amen.

Rejoice and Reflect

Today I choose to rejoice in the Lord's justice, joining in the ancient cry of all God's people in the great invocation of Psalm 7...

*Arise, O Lord, in anger! Stand up against the fury of my enemies!
Wake up, my God, and bring justice! Gather the nations before you.
Rule over them from on high...
I will thank the Lord because he is just;
I will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High.
Psalm 7:6-7,17*

Pause and pray

In today's reading which comes from the book of Leviticus, God sets out one of the oldest pieces of social welfare legislation in human history. It's a radically simple model of wealth-redistribution for the sake of the poor...

*The Lord said to Moses, 'Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy...
When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.'*
Leviticus 19:1-2,9-10

I'm struck by the way that God so clearly equates holiness in this passage with practical, costly generosity towards those who are vulnerable in society, refugees and those from other cultures. He directly connects the way I may worship on Sunday with the way I do business on Monday.

Ask

To whom could I give the gleanings from my fields today? Maybe I could give them a little money, a thoughtful gift, or even simply the generous gift of time.

Pause and pray

Lord, make me interruptible today. Help me to be fully present to those who cross my path. Bring me someone for whom I can be generous with my time, my attention or my resources.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I notice the apparent wastefulness of God's economy.

The Lord said to Moses, 'Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy...

'When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.'

Leviticus 19:1-2,9-10

It was in direct obedience to this commandment that a rich landowner named Boaz, allowed a penniless refugee, Ruth, to glean at the corners of his fields in a little town called Bethlehem. They got married, and one of their great-grandchildren was King David. Another of their children was Jesus. It's an incredible legacy born out of Boaz' willingness to waste some of his resources, refusing to be driven by the bottom-line, being generous towards the poor.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I live so much of my life without margin, with my foot flat to the floor. I yield to Your undergirding goodness today. I choose to relax and live more sacrificially for the blessing of others. I acknowledge that everything I have comes from You. Help me to be generous.

Yielding Promise

Thank You Lord that You promise to provide for all my needs if I will just seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness. (Matthew 6:33)

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.*

*Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.*

*Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.*

Amen.

August 12 2020. Poor Me (click for audio)

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of justice and mercy, I come before You now with an awareness of those whose prayers today are sighs, sobs or even screams for help. Soften my heart to care more keenly, sharpen my mind to think more clearly, and clench my fists to fight more fiercely for those who are oppressed. Amen.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's love and justice today, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 101...

I will sing of your love and justice, Lord. I will praise you with songs.

I will be careful to live a blameless life – when will you come and help me?

I will live a life of integrity in my own home.

I will refuse to look at anything vile or vulgar...

My daily task will be to ferret out the wicked and free the city of the Lord from their grip.

Psalm 101:1-3a, 8

Pause and pray

It's easy to reduce justice to a feeling of outrage or a meme on social media, but in today's Bible reading God commands us to live with integrity and to care for the poor in some very practical ways...

Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight. Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling-block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord. Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

Leviticus 19:13-15

'It ain't those parts of the Bible I can't understand that bother me,' said Mark Twain, 'it's the parts that I do understand.' These challenging verses from Leviticus are simple, specific and clear: God commands us to pay our bills on time; not to exploit people with disabilities and to be scrupulously fair in our dealings with everyone. Ouch!

Ask

God of Mercy, help me to be fair today. Show me if there is anyone I'm secretly exploiting or using...

In what ways am I showing favoritism in my friendships, my workplace or even in my own family?

Pause and pray

Lord, I pray for people I know who are living with disabilities and other difficulties today. Naming them before You now I pray for them to experience special grace as they endure so much injustice and misunderstanding. Show me how I can show them a little more of Your loving kindness and radical acceptance today.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight. Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling-block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord. Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

Leviticus 19:13-15

Isn't it interesting that we are told not to show partiality towards the poor as well as the rich? Most people show favoritism towards those who are socially powerful, but it's also possible to be biased against them, especially if we live and work on the margins. Only by God's grace can we remain radically kind and universally fair.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, I am rich and privileged in so many ways. Today I yield to Your humility and acknowledge my innate sense of entitlement. But I am also poor and weak in so many ways, and today I yield to You as the friend of the poor, my advocate and champion in this world.

Yielding Promise

Lord, You challenge me to change but You also promise to help me change. Thank You for your beautiful promise that, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' (2 Cor 12:9).

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.*

*Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.*

*Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.*

Amen.

August 13 2020 The Moravian Pentecost (click for audio)

It was on this day 293 years ago that an outpouring of the Holy Spirit came upon a community of Moravian Christians at Herrnhut, in modern-day Germany; a moment that launched a movement that changed the world.

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Holy Spirit, fill me today as You filled the Moravians all those years ago in Herrnhut. Ignite in me a passion for prayer and a fearless ambition for Your gospel. Let me learn from their example that I might follow in their footsteps. Amen.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's unfailing love from generation to generation, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 100...

Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good.

His unfailing love continues forever,

and his faithfulness continues to each generation.

Psalm 100:4-5

Pause and pray

The great Moravian Pentecost of 13th August 1727 ignited a prayer meeting which continued non-stop for more than a hundred years, propelling missionaries like rockets, aflame with the gospel, to the ends of the earth, and launching the modern missions movement. It's a moment worth remembering and celebrating each year!

It had begun five years earlier when a bedraggled band of refugees arrived on the country estate of Count Zinzendorf at Berthelsdorf in Saxony, fleeing for their lives from fierce religious persecution in their homelands of Bohemia and Moravia across the Austrian Alps to the south. Zinzendorf offered them extraordinary hospitality, provoked no doubt by his Mustard Seed vow to 'be kind to all people'. He permitted the Moravians to settle on his land where they built a village called Herrnhut, 'the Watch of the Lord'.

But the new community was far from idyllic. For five years they bickered and argued until this day in 1727 when they gathered in the church and repented before the Lord. Count Zinzendorf himself recorded what happened next: 'The Savior permitted to come upon us a Spirit of whom we had hitherto not had any experience or knowledge. Hitherto we had been the leaders and helpers. Now the Holy Spirit Himself took full control of everything and everybody.'*

Some fell to the floor under the power of the Holy Spirit. It was even reported that some of the community working 20 miles away had the same experience at the same time!

*John Greenfield, Mart S Mirza, *Power from on High: The Two Hundredth anniversary of the Great Moravian Revival 1727-1927*, p25

Ask

The example of the Moravians challenges me in many ways. Firstly, I must think about broken relationships and bad attitudes towards other Christians. Where am I carrying resentment, a critical spirit or unforgiveness? Am I holding too tightly to particular opinions and hurts from the past. I take time now to invite the Holy Spirit to search my heart, and to repent.

Pause and pray

The Moravians gained the nickname 'Unitas Fratrum' – the united brethren. The Holy Spirit turned their great weakness into a very great strength. Thinking now of other types of Churches, not my own, I pray for God's extravagant blessing upon them, asking 'that [we] may be brought to complete unity.' (John 17:23).

Pause and pray

Yield

Opening my hands before the Lord now, I pause and wait as I invite the Holy Spirit to fill me afresh.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

A prayer from the Catholic mass for Pentecost – *Veni Sancte Spiritus*:

*Come, Holy Spirit,
send forth the heavenly radiance of your light...
Cleanse that which is unclean,
water that which is dry, heal that which is wounded.
Bend that which is inflexible,
fire that which is chilled, correct what goes astray...
Grant the reward of virtue,
grant the deliverance of salvation, grant eternal joy.*

Yielding Promise

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your absolute promise that the Father will 'give the Holy Spirit to those who ask!' (Luke 11:13) Father God, please keep filling me with Your Spirit throughout the coming day.

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.
Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.
Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.
Amen.*

August 14 2020 The Least, The Last and The Lost (click for audio)

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of justice and mercy, I come before You now with an awareness of those whose prayers today are sighs, sobs or even screams for help. Soften my heart to care more keenly, sharpen my mind to think more clearly, and clench my fists to fight more fiercely for those who are oppressed. Amen.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's prevailing mercy today, joining in the redemption song of all God's people in the ancient words of Psalm 103...

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.
Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion.
Bless the Lord, O my soul!
Psalm 103:1-6, 22 (ESV)*

Pause and pray

Today's reading reminds me of my own refugee status and of my duty to show mercy since I myself have received such mercy from the Lord...

*Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.
Deuteronomy 10:16-19*

Some biblical priorities are bigger than politics. Whether your political sympathies lean more towards the left or the right, the Bible is absolutely clear that God has a particular love for the poor, the orphan, the single mother, the immigrant and the refugee. He blesses us in order to be a blessing to those who are particularly vulnerable and we should therefore pray, act and vote accordingly.

Ask

Father, would You give me eyes to see the hidden pain of the people I will meet in the coming day. I name before You now those known to me who may feel marginalized, dis empowered or overlooked.

Pause and pray

Lord, I cry out to You for the 70 million men, women and children displaced by war and disaster in our world right now. Renew the strength of those working in refugee camps and immigration centers. And raise up politicians of every party who will prioritize hospitality and champion generosity in our nation.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.
Deuteronomy 10:16-19

God says that it is precisely because I was once a foreigner, enslaved in Egypt, that I am now expected to be merciful towards foreigners in my own land. I am required to welcome those from other cultures and nations. I am expected to make space for those on the fringes of my current friendship group.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord I yield to Your astonishing kindness again today. I am a foreigner welcomed home, a slave set free, a prodigal embraced by unconditional love. And so, even as I am loved and accepted, teach me to love and not to fear those who are unlike me today.

Yielding Promise

I cling onto your promise over my life, today, that we will: "rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings." (Is. 58:12)

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.
Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.
Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.
Amen.*

August 15 2020 Why Jesus Came (click for audio)

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of justice and mercy, I come before You now with an awareness of those whose prayers today are sighs, sobs or even screams for help. Soften my heart to care more keenly, sharpen my mind to think more clearly, and clench my fists to fight more fiercely for those who are oppressed. Amen.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's fairness and faithfulness today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 146...

Joyful are those who have the God of Israel as their helper, whose hope is in the Lord their God.

He made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them.

He keeps every promise forever.

He gives justice to the oppressed and food to the hungry.

The Lord frees the prisoners.

The Lord opens the eyes of the blind.

The Lord lifts up those who are weighed down.

The Lord loves the godly.

Psalm 146:5-8

Pause and pray

In today's Bible reading, Isaiah predicts the coming of a suffering servant to bring justice to the nations. He is prophesying at least 500 years before Jesus...

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight;

I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.

He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.

Isaiah 42:1-4

If someone asked why Jesus came to earth, I might say 'to die for our sins', or 'to heal the sick', or 'to bring us into relationship with the Father' and all these things would be true. But Isaiah's answer might have been a little different. Three times in these four verses he predicts that God's servant will come to 'establish justice on the earth'.

And this is precisely how Jesus himself defines His own mission in Luke 4, claiming the words of Isaiah for himself: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me,' He says, 'to proclaim good news to the poor...' (Luke 4:18)

Ask

Isaiah says that the Servant ‘will not falter or be discouraged’ but Lord, I often feel helpless. Things often seem hopeless. I often get discouraged. Would You please send me someone to encourage me in the coming day?

Pause and pray

I take a little time now to pray about a particular situation of injustice in today’s news, focusing my prayers on three ‘P’s: The *People* affected, the *Peacemakers* on the ground, trying to help, and the *Politicians* working to dismantle and replace unjust systems.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I allow myself to marvel at the meekness of Jesus...

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight;

I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.

He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.

Isaiah 42:1-4

Jesus does not cry out. He doesn’t so much as break a bruised reed. God, it turns out, is not an A-Type power-player. This is precisely my experience. I often ask the Lord to work forcefully, to intervene dramatically and to speak unmistakably, but his way is gentle, slow, and meek. I am challenged to speak less in the coming day, and instead to prioritize the feelings of those who are vulnerable like a ‘bruised reed’ or fragile like a ‘smoldering wick’

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Father, I choose to side with the under-dog and to identify with those who are bruised and broken. I yield to Your slow, painful strategy for establishing justice on earth. Give me the patience I need to persevere, and the defiance I need to keep fighting until You have established justice on earth’.

Yielding Promise

Thank You Lord, that You have chosen ‘the foolish things of the world to shame the wise... the weak things of the world to shame the strong... the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are.’ (1 Cor. 1:27-28)

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say. Amen.

August 16 2020 A Sabbath Blessing (click for audio)

At the end of a week thinking about justice, it's easy to feel relentlessly responsible for tackling all the world's insurmountable problems. But today I pause and receive again God's grace and mercy.

'Come, all you who are thirsty,' He says, 'come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!' Isaiah 55:1

Pause and pray

Are you tired?' Asks Jesus, 'Are you worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.' (Matthew 11:28-30 MSG)

Pause and pray

Sabbath,' says the theologian Walter Brueggemann: 'is the refusal to let one's life be defined by production and consumption and the endless pursuit of private well-being.'*

Lord, I come to You for a deep rest today. I spend so much of my life dissatisfied; wanting more stuff, more money, more friends, more applause, more miracles. Today I put away my superhero cape and thank You, very simply, that because I have You I have everything I will ever truly need. I take a moment now to pray for those who really don't have enough. Is there a particular person I know, or crises elsewhere in the world, where God's justice and mercy are desperately needed today?

Pause and pray

I recommit myself to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the coming week:

Spirit of the Sovereign Lord, anoint me again this week to proclaim good news to the poor. Send me out again this week to bind up the broken-hearted. Help me again this week to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners. Amen.

Pause and pray

Sabbath blessing

May this day bring sabbath rest to my heart and my home.

May God's image in me be restored, and my imagination in God be re-storied.

May the gravity of material things be lightened, and the relativity of time slow down.

May I know grace to embrace my own finite smallness in the arms of God's infinite greatness.

*May God's Word feed me and his Spirit lead me into the week and into the life to come.***

*Sabbath as Resistance by Walter Brueggemann p.6

**Sabbath Blessing by Pete Greig, petegreig.info

August 17 2020 (click for audio)

Heart's Desire

Together we're exploring how characters, laws and encounters express love for God through prayer and creativity, love for others through justice and hospitality, and love for the world through mission and learning. This week, we're following ancient paths of learning.

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Holy Spirit, my teacher, as I dive into the Bible, would You awaken my heart, expand my mind and shape my identity today?

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's majesty and awe, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 89...

*All heaven will praise your great wonders, LORD;
myriads of angels will praise you for your faithfulness.
For who in all of heaven can compare with the LORD?
What mightiest angel is anything like the LORD?
The highest angelic powers stand in awe of God.
He is far more awesome than all who surround his throne.
Psalm 89:5–7*

Pause and pray

Today I'm reflecting on Deuteronomy 6. The Lord has given Moses the Ten Commandments and now he is sharing them with the people and describing how they should live. It all begins with these words...

*Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.
Deuteronomy 6:4–7*

Desire is a powerful thing. My desires shape my thinking, motivate my decision-making and influence what I pursue and prize. This is where the Lord begins when shaping Israel to live as His people on earth, encouraging them to deliberately nurture their love for, and relationship with, Him.

Ask

What love or desires most capture my heart, enliven my soul and occupy my mind at present?
I ask You, Spirit, to show me how I can deliberately stir my love for God and make space to dwell on and be with You.

Pause and pray

Who do I want to know God's love for themselves today? A friend from college or work? Maybe someone in my family?

I ask You, Father, to draw them to Your Son, and to stir up a desire in them that can only be satisfied by You.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Deuteronomy 6:4–7

God makes a connection between my love for Him and my desire to follow His instruction.

'These commandments... are to be on your hearts.' He encourages me not just to read, or listen passively to His words, but to ponder, teach and discuss them with others.

Who am I discussing, debating or sharing God's Word with? How can I deliberately engage with the Bible – on my own and with others outside of my church's gatherings?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, I know my motivation matters. I admit that sometimes I treat reading the Bible as just another thing I need to get done. I'm sorry. When I spend time with Your Word this week, help me to read it with expectation, listening carefully, and may I spend the rest of my day savoring what You've said.

Yielding Promise

I trust in the promise from Proverbs that, 'the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding' (Prov. 2:6).

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.

Amen.

August 18 2020 (click for audio)

Tough Act to Follow

Together we will pray (**P.R.A.Y.**) very simply each day – ‘**P**’: PAUSING to be still. ‘**R**’: REJOICING with a psalm and REFLECTING on a scripture relating to learning. ‘**A**’: ASKING God to help us and others and ‘**Y**’: YIELDING to His will in our lives, come what may.

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Holy Spirit, my teacher, as I dive into the Bible, would You awaken my heart, expand my mind and shape my identity today?

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's righteousness and justice, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 89...

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne.

Unfailing love and truth walk before you as attendants.

*Happy are those who hear the joyful call to worship,
for they will walk in the light of your presence, LORD.*

Psalm 89:14–15

Pause and pray

Today I'm reflecting on a passage from the book of 2 Chronicles. Solomon has succeeded his father David to the throne of Israel. In one of his first acts as king, he has gone to seek the Lord...

That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, 'Ask for whatever you want me to give you.' Solomon answered God, 'You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place... Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?' God said to Solomon, 'Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, possessions or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, possessions and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have.'

2 Chronicles 1:7–8,10–12

King David's reign was known as the golden age of Israel. When Solomon succeeded the throne, he was stepping into some pretty big shoes. Not only that, but he was charged with fulfilling his father's greatest dream: building a temple for the Lord.

When have I faced a challenge that felt truly beyond me? Who was the first person I went to for help?

Ask

Do I feel pressured to live up to someone else's reputation, success or expectation?

I ask You, Lord, to shift my perspective, relieve the pressure and give me the tools I need to play the part only I can.

Pause and pray

Solomon was a newly crowned king taking on the leadership of a nation. God praised him for seeking wisdom to do his job well.

Lord, I lift those in authority in my country to You today. I ask You to give them the wisdom they need to lead.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, 'Ask for whatever you want me to give you.' Solomon answered God, 'You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place... Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?' God said to Solomon, 'Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, possessions or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, possessions and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have.'

2 Chronicles 1:7–8,10–12

There are many areas of my life where I feel under qualified or out of my depth. In his letter, James writes, 'If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you' (James 1:5).

Where do I need the Lord's help right now? *Lord, would You give me Your gift of wisdom to help me navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead?*

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Thank You, Father, that You are with me through every challenge I face. I invite You into every stretching situation and ask You to use them to lead me into new learning and greater maturity.

Yielding Promise

Lord, thank You that You give wisdom generously to all who ask (James 1:5). Today, I seek that wisdom afresh.

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say. Amen.

August 19 2020 (click for audio)
Putting Down Roots

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Holy Spirit, my teacher, as I dive into the Bible, would You awaken my heart, expand my mind and shape my identity today?

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's constant presence, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 90...

*Lord, through all the generations
you have been our home!
Before the mountains were born,
before you gave birth to the earth and the world,
from beginning to end, you are God.
Psalm 90:1–2*

Pause and pray

Today's reading is from the first psalm and has been one of my favorites for many years...

*Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither –
whatever they do prospers.
Psalm 1:1–3*

I love standing beneath a huge tree, face tilted upward, catching the sun through the branches. I imagine the root structure, as vast below ground as the trunk and branches are above, spreading beneath me.

The depth and breadth of a tree's roots determine its stability, and its ability to draw life-giving nutrients from the soil.

Ask

If I imagine the time I spend with God and His Word as the roots of my faith, how firm and life-giving a foundation do I have?

Spirit, I ask You to show me what I can do today to deepen and broaden my relationship with God and His Word.

Pause and pray

Who does this psalm remind me of? Who do I know who delights in God's Word and whose life is full of good fruit?

God, I ask You to take their roots deeper and expand their branches further. Help them to impart what they've learned of You to those around them.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I ask you, Holy Spirit, to highlight a word or phrase for me today.

*Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither –
whatever they do prospers.*

Psalms 1:1–3

A mature tree produces fruit and offers shelter for birds and animals. God's Word in my life will not only nourish and strengthen me, but others around me.

Who have I interacted with in the past week? How have they benefited from my relationship with God?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord Jesus, the living Word, I open myself up to Your voice in my life. I want to learn something new today. Teach me to not only read the Bible, but to sink the roots of my life deep into its wisdom.

Yielding Promise

I trust in Your promise in Matthew 7, that if I listen to Your words, and put them into action, I am building my life on a firm foundation (Matt. 7:24–25).

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say. Amen.

August 20 2020 (click for audio)

Bernard of Clairvaux

On feast days, we pause from praying the Bible to celebrate the stories and learn from the lives of heroes of faith whose collective witness embodies our six practices at the heart of *Lectio 365*, which are Prayer, Creativity, Justice, Hospitality, Learning and Mission. Today we are thanking God for the extraordinary example of Bernard of Clairvaux, a hero of prayer.

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

As I draw near to You, God, would You draw near to me? Teach me to pray. Speak Lord, Your servant is listening.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's protection, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 91...

*Those who live in the shelter of the Most High
will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.*

This I declare about the LORD:

*He alone is my refuge, my place of safety;
he is my God, and I trust him.*

Psalm 91:1–2

Pause and pray

Born in France in 1090, Bernard's mother died when he was just 19. Following his call to a life of prayer at 22, he turned up at his local monastery with no fewer than 30 friends who all wanted to become monks with him. He was a natural leader and they set about reviving the community which grew quickly. In 1115, Bernard planted his first monastery at a place he named Clairvaux in north eastern France. Over his lifetime, Bernard was used by God – despite many mistakes – to completely revitalize the Cistercian Order. He also helped to establish 163 other monasteries in different parts of Europe.

Bernard was also, 'instrumental in re-emphasizing the importance of *Lectio Divina* (Latin for 'divine reading') and contemplation on Scripture within the Cistercian Order... He considered *Lectio Divina* and contemplation guided by the Holy Spirit the keys to nourishing Christian spirituality.'*

Bernard wrote about the Bible: 'For our meditations on the Word who is the Bridegroom, on his glory, his elegance, power and majesty, become in a sense his way of speaking to us. And not only that, but when with eager minds we examine his rulings, the decrees from his own mouth; when we meditate on his law day and night, let us be assured that the Bridegroom is present,

and that he speaks his message of happiness to us lest our trials should prove more than we can bear.’**

I have to admit that sometimes I approach the Bible in a utilitarian manner. I want to skim quickly, find something helpful and then use it to achieve whatever desired results I am looking for.

Lectio Divina is a different way of approaching the Scriptures. It is a prayerful way of reading the Word of God in order to encounter the living Word, Jesus Christ. In *Lectio Divina*, we read slowly, repeatedly. We reflect on the Word, we respond to it and rest in it, just like we are doing right now.

* Lawrence S. Cunningham and Keith J. Egan, ‘Meditation and contemplation’ *Christian Spirituality: Themes from the Tradition* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996) pp90–91

**Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Jazzybee Verlag: Kindle Edition) p182

Ask

How do I approach the Scriptures? Do I read them, or am I read by them? Do I attempt to master them, or do I allow them to master me? Do I believe that God is present as I read, and that He has a message for me?

Pause and pray

Bernard said that meditating on the Word strengthens us so that we can face the trials and burdens that are an inevitable part of human experience. Often, when I’m struggling, I take a simple phrase from the Bible, like ‘The LORD is the stronghold of my life’ (Psa. 27:1) and I pray it over and over throughout my day. I find that it redirects my thinking and changes my emotional chemistry for the better.

Who needs help today? *Lord, I ask You for a verse from Your Word to pray over and over for them throughout today.*

Pause and pray

Yield

Bernard of Clairvaux also said, ‘Consider how great is the grace of intimacy which results from this encounter of the soul and the Word, and how great the confidence which follows this intimacy! I think such a soul need not fear to say, “my beloved is mine”’.***

Some say the hardest and longest journey a person can make is the 18 inches from head to heart. Bernard of Clairvaux taught that meditating on the Word creates that vital link. Modern-day contemplatives like Misty Edwards echo this conviction, singing:

I'll take my cold, cold heart
I'll take my unrenewed mind
I'll take Your Word in my hand and then I'll give You time
To come and melt me’****

*** Bernard of Clairvaux, *Intimacy in Prayer: Wisdom from Bernard of Clairvaux* (Pauline Books and Media: Kindle Edition)

**** Misty Edwards, ‘*What Only You Can Do*’, ‘*Always on His Mind*’ album (Forerunner Music, 2014)

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Thank You, Lord, that I am nourished by Your Word; it is as sweet as honey. I know that if I take the time to savor its taste, it is a doorway of revelation, a doorway of encounter, but, so often, I bolt it down like fast food.

Today, I choose to slow down, I steep myself in Your Word, expectant and hungry for Your voice.

Yielding Promise

I thank You, God, for the encouragement of Psalm 1, that if I delight in, and meditate on Your Word, then my life will bear fruit for You (Psa. 1:2–3).

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.*

*Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.*

*Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.*

Amen.

August 21 2020 (click for audio)
From Head to Heart

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Holy Spirit, my teacher, as I dive into the Bible, would You awaken my heart, expand my mind and shape my identity today?

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's power and provision, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 92...

*You thrill me, LORD, with all you have done for me!
I sing for joy because of what you have done.
O LORD, what great works you do!
And how deep are your thoughts.
Psalm 92:4–5*

Pause and pray

Today's reflection is from Proverbs. This is a book of wisdom, much of it from King Solomon. As I listen to these words, I invite the Holy Spirit to reveal something new to me today...

*My son, do not forget my teaching,
but keep my commands in your heart,
for they will prolong your life many years
and bring you peace and prosperity.
Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
bind them round your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
Then you will win favor and a good name
in the sight of God and man.
Proverbs 3:1–4*

When my daughter was in the 'No' phase as a two-year-old, she wanted the opposite of anything I suggested. When something was important, I had to find ways to help her understand why 'Yes' might be a better response. I would describe how fun it would be if we left the house and went to the park, or how large her muscles would grow if she ate all her dinner.

The writer of this passage sounds like a persuasive parent to me, describing a life of peace, prosperity, longevity and favor with God. This sounds great! How do I get it? Through listening carefully, learning diligently and living a life of faithfulness and love.

Ask

What would it mean for me to bind love and faithfulness round my neck? How can I display them to others? How can I write them on the tablet of my heart? How can I grow in love and faithfulness in my innermost being?

Lord, help me to make the poetry of this passage a reality today.

Pause and pray

I think about the parents I know – grandparents, single parents, step-parents, foster parents and others.

Lord, please give them strength. Whether they are herding toddlers or taxiing teenagers today, I ask You, Lord, to fill them with Your Spirit as they make disciples.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

*My son, do not forget my teaching,
but keep my commands in your heart,
for they will prolong your life many years
and bring you peace and prosperity.
Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
bind them round your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
Then you will win favor and a good name
in the sight of God and man.*

Proverbs 3:1–4

I'm struck by the fact that I can choose how much access I give God and His wisdom to my life. I could skim over and soon forget today's passage, or I could immerse myself in it, memorize the words and put them into action.

Is there anywhere in my life where I am not choosing God's wisdom? Is there a relationship or situation where I have forgotten or purposely put aside His teaching?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, show me how to move the wisdom and teaching of Your Word from my head to my heart. I surrender to Your greater knowledge and broader understanding in my life.

Yielding Promise

I trust that, 'the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart' (Heb. 4:12).

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say. Amen.

August 22 2020 (click for audio)

Trust and Submission

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Holy Spirit, my teacher, as I dive into the Bible, would You awaken my heart, expand my mind and shape my identity today?

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in how God is always present, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 93...

*The LORD is king! He is robed in majesty.
Indeed, the LORD is robed in majesty and armed with strength.
The world stands firm and cannot be shaken.
Your throne, O LORD, has stood from time immemorial.
You yourself are from the everlasting past.
Psalm 93:1–2*

Pause and pray

Today's reflection is from the book of Proverbs. For me, these verses are some of the most challenging to put into practice...

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.
Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.
This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones.
Proverbs 3:5–8*

There are two words I find incredibly challenging in this passage. The first is 'trust'. It's easy to say that I'm trusting in God, but often my thoughts or actions tell a different story. I pray, 'I trust You, God,' but then I worry about how I'll solve my problems and sometimes spend sleepless nights fretting.

The second challenging word is 'submit'. Submitting is when the rubber hits the road. Can I let go of the steering wheel, allow God to get in the driver's seat and guide my journey toward His destination?

Ask

What am I worried about? Is there a need, a situation or a relationship that's occupying my thoughts? Am I finding it hard to surrender to God?

Lord, help me to trust You.

Pause and pray

Who do I know who needs health in their body and nourishment in their bones today?

Lord, I ask You to heal them.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I ask you, Holy Spirit, to highlight a word or phrase for me today.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.
Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.
This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones.
Proverbs 3:5–8*

Trusting God means relinquishing control. In his book, *Prayers from the Heart**, Richard Foster shares a prayer of relinquishment that has challenged and inspired me as I have practiced surrendering my life to God's loving care. I pray this prayer now...

**Richard Foster, Prayers from the Heart (HarperSanFrancisco, USA: 1994)*

Yielding Prayer

*Today, O Lord, I yield myself to You.
May Your will be my delight today.
May Your way have perfect sway in me.
May Your love be the pattern of my living.
I surrender to You my hopes, my dreams, my ambitions.
Do with them what You will, when You will, as You will.
I place into Your loving care my family, my friends, my future.
Care for them with a care that I can never give.
I release into Your hands my need to control, my craving for status, my fear of obscurity.
Eradicate the evil, purify the good, and establish Your Kingdom on earth.
For Jesus' sake
Amen.*

Yielding Promise

Thank You, Lord, for Your promise in the book of James that if I humble myself before You, You will lift me up (James 4:10).

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.
Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.
Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say. Amen.*

August 23 2020 (click for audio)
A Sabbath Blessing

Today, the day of rest, we interrupt our usual pattern with a shorter, simpler time of prayer. And so, as I settle into this time of prayer, I ask God to renew in me a tender, teachable heart.

Pause and pray

Psalm 119 says,
*I have hidden your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you...
Open my eyes to see
the wonderful truths in your instructions.
I am only a foreigner in the land.
Don't hide your commands from me!
I am always overwhelmed
with a desire for your regulations...
Your laws please me;
they give me wise advice.*
Psalm 119:11,18–20,24

Pause and pray

In his book, *Sabbath**, Wayne Muller says: 'Because we do not rest, we lose our way. We miss the compass points that would show us where to go, we bypass the nourishment that would give us succor. We miss the quiet that would give us wisdom. We miss the joy and love born of effortless delight.'

Holy Spirit, help me to rest today, and as I do so, give me wisdom. I welcome Your presence and revelation within my life. Converse with my spirit so that the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, may be acceptable in Your sight today.

**Wayne Muller, Sabbath (Bantam :2000)*

Pause and pray

I pray for the preaching of God's Word around the world today:

Father, I thank You that millions of people will learn from the Bible today. Please speak powerfully to convict, to comfort and to conform our minds to Yours.

Jesus, I pray today for all the children learning about You. Thank You that You always love to put them first. Help me to be more trusting, humble and playful like them.

Holy Spirit, revive us today. Inspire politicians and educators, artists and journalists, economists and scientists at church today, with the kinds of ideas that can change the world for good.

Pause and pray

I take a moment now to earth these big prayers in my own local community, naming someone I know who is either a student, an educator or a parent as they disciple their own children.

Pause and pray

Sabbath Blessing

May this day bring Sabbath rest to my heart and my home.

May God's image in me be restored, and my imagination in God be re-storied.

May the gravity of material things be lightened, and the relativity of time slow down.

May I know grace to embrace my own finite smallness in the arms of God's infinite greatness.

*May God's Word feed me and His Spirit lead me into the week and into the life to come. ***

****Sabbath Blessing by Pete Greig, petegreig.info**

August 24 2020 (click for audio)

During this season we're exploring how particular characters, divine encounters and laws in the Old Testament can help us to express love for God through prayer and creativity, love for others through justice and hospitality, and love for the world through mission and learning. This week, we're looking at the practice of mission through the story of Abram.

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of rescue and restoration, thank You for Your great and beautiful mission in the world. Here I am Lord, fill me with Your Spirit and send me.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's might and power, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 93...

*The floods have risen up, O LORD.
The floods have roared like thunder;
the floods have lifted their pounding waves.
But mightier than the violent raging of the seas,
mightier than the breakers on the shore—
the LORD above is mightier than these!
Psalm 93:3–4*

Pause and pray

The prophet Isaiah describes Abraham as a 'friend of God' (Isa. 41:8), and James, the brother of Jesus, says the same thing in his letter (James 2:23). In today's reading, from Genesis, we are introduced to Abraham's, or Abram's, family for the first time...

This is the account of Terah's family line. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milkah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and Iskah. Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive.

Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there. Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

Genesis 11:27–32

Terah and his family un-settled their lives in Ur of the Chaldeans and set out for Canaan, the land of promise. But they didn't get there. For some reason they stopped and settled in Harran instead.

As I think about my life so far, I can remember times when I have left things behind and set out. And then there have been seasons of settling into new places, responsibilities and relationships. Setting out and settling are *both* important. However, just like Terah and his family, it's possible for me to settle too early, to miss reaching the destination, the place of promise... perhaps when the journey seems to be taking too long, or the task is too demanding, or the way ahead too dark?

Ask

Is there an area in my life where I have settled too early, for whatever reason, instead of continuing to trust God and take risks?

God, I'm sorry for where I have settled too early and too easily. I know that this is risky, but I ask You to unsettle me again.

Pause and pray

A mission is an important task that someone is sent somewhere to do. The first step to fulfilling any mission is setting out.

God, are You speaking to me or to my church community? Are You asking us to set out? Where and to whom are You sending us? I ask You, God, to give us the courage to set out, to take steps of faith, and to trust that You'll be with us as we go.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

This is the account of Terah's family line. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milkah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and Iskah. Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive.

Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there. Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

Genesis 11:27–32

Eventually, Abram, Sarai and Lot left Harran, and they set out again and traveled to Canaan. Many years later, Abram's grandson Jacob returned to Harran. While he was there, Jacob worked for his uncle Laban and married Laban's daughters, Leah and Rachel. And then it was in Harran – the on-the-way place where Terah and his family first settled – that Jacob's children, the future tribes of Israel, were born, the descendants that God had promised to Abram.

Sometimes, God's promises begin to be fulfilled in unexpected, on-the-way places like Harran.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, thank You that You are with me when I set out and You are with me when I settle. You are even with me when I settle too early – somehow You still find ways to begin to bring Your promises to birth. I yield, once again, to Your purposes for my life.

Yielding Promise

Today, I thank You, Lord, for Your promise in Jeremiah that You know the plans that are ahead for me, and that they are plans that bring hope and not harm (Jer. 29:11).

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.

Amen.

August 25 2020 (click for audio)

Together we will pray (P.R.A.Y.) each day – ‘P’: PAUSING to be still. ‘R’: REJOICING with a psalm and REFLECTING on a scripture relating to mission. ‘A’: ASKING God to help us live more missionally, and ‘Y’: YIELDING to His will in our lives, come what may.

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of rescue and restoration, thank You for Your great and beautiful mission in the world. Here I am Lord, fill me with Your Spirit and send me.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God and all He has done for me, joining with the ancient praise of all God’s people in the words of Psalm 95...

*Come, let us sing to the LORD!
Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come to him with thanksgiving.
Let us sing psalms of praise to him
Psalm 95:1–2*

Pause and pray

Today’s reading comes from the book of Genesis and is commonly described as ‘the call of Abram’. Abram was on his way to Canaan, but he chose to settle in Harran instead. However, God had other ideas...

*The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.
I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’
So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.
Genesis 12:1–4*

God told Abram to set out from Harran and leave three things behind: his country, his people and his father’s house.

‘Go from your country’ says God. Leave behind familiar places and go somewhere new.

‘Go from your people’ says God. Leave behind those you know and go build new relationships.

‘Go from your father’s household’ says God. Leave behind what is safe and secure – what has worked so far – and go.

Ask

Is there anything in my life that God is asking me to leave behind? Is God speaking to me about going somewhere new, maybe to a new town or a new job? Is God speaking to me about making time for new relationships? Is God speaking to me about a new way of living?

I ask You, God, to give me courage to leave what is safe and familiar, and to follow You.

Pause and pray

As I think about the world today, I am aware that there are many who are leaving their countries, their loved ones and their livelihoods. They're not leaving because God has called them, but because they are in great danger due to war, natural disasters or persecution.

I ask You, God, to go with them, protect them and to bless them.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

The LORD had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;

I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.

Genesis 12:1–4

The Lord told Abram to go, and he went.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, You know what I'm like. I like things the way they are. I don't particularly like it when things change, or when I have to change because I get scared, and I find it hard to trust You.

Help me to trust You today. I choose to listen to You today, and to obey Your word to me. I surrender to You and Your call on my life, wherever that is, and to whoever, and whatever that looks like.

Yielding Promise

God, thank You that no matter where I go, just as You promised Joshua, you promise me, 'I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you' (Josh. 1:5).

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say. Amen.

August 26 2020 (click for audio)

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of rescue and restoration, thank You for Your great and beautiful mission in the world. Here I am Lord, fill me with Your Spirit and send me.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's creation and creativity, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 95...

*For the LORD is a great God,
a great King above all gods.
He holds in his hands the depths of the earth
and the mightiest mountains.
The sea belongs to him, for he made it.
His hands formed the dry land, too.
Psalm 95:3–5*

Pause and pray

Today's reading comes from the book of Genesis (and, yes, it is the same reading as yesterday), the few verses known as 'the call of Abram'. Having lived in Harran for many years, Abram leaves it all behind when God calls.

*The LORD had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.
I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'
So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.
Genesis 12:1–4*

During the Great Plague of London in 1666, sneezing was one of the first symptoms of the virus, and so people would say 'Bless you!' or 'God bless you!' in the hope that God would save the person from certain death. So, what do I mean when I say, 'Bless you!' after someone sneezes today? And what does it mean when someone says, 'Ahh... bless her' as they smile at a baby girl in her pram? We use the word 'bless' in all sorts of ways, and some of them are a bit vague. Blessing can be understood as giving power to something or somebody to be and do that which they are designed to be and do. 'I will bless you,' says the Lord to Abram, 'to be and do all that I

have made you to be and do. And through you, others will become all that they are made to be too!’

Ask

I imagine the Lord speaking my name right now and saying those same words: ‘I bless you. I give you power to become all that I have made you to be, and to do all that I have prepared for you to do.’

I ask You, Lord, to help me receive this blessing and this power.

Pause and pray

One of the Church of England’s diocese has the following mission statement: ‘to bless our communities in Jesus’ name, for the good of us all.’

As I think about my local community right now, I ask You, God, to bless it – to bless all those that live and work in it. May we become all that You made us to be, and to do all that You have prepared for us to do.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;

I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.

Genesis 12:1–4

Most of God’s call to Abram won’t be fulfilled in his lifetime. ‘I will make you into a great nation,’ says God, and ‘all people will be blessed through you.’

Sometimes God’s call is an invitation to serve, to play a small part in something that is much bigger than me, something whose fruit and fulfillment I will never fully see.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I yield to Your call. Bless me and make me a blessing to others, everyone, everywhere – to infinity and beyond!

Yielding Promise

Lord, thank You that You promise to fill me with all joy and peace as I trust in You, through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13). Thank You that You are working in me, today.

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.*

*Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.*

*Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.*

Amen.

August 27 2020 (click for audio)

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of rescue and restoration, thank You for Your great and beautiful mission in the world. Here I am Lord, fill me with Your Spirit and send me.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's majesty, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 95...

*Come, let us worship and bow down.
Let us kneel before the LORD our maker,
for he is our God.
We are the people he watches over,
the flock under his care.
If only you would listen to his voice today!
Psalm 95:6–7*

Pause and pray

Today's reading comes from the book of Genesis. Having lived in Harran for many years, Abram and his family finally set out for the promised land together...

*Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.
From there he went on towards the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.
Then Abram set out and continued towards the Negev.
Genesis 12:4–9*

Having entered Canaan, Abram's family arrive at Shechem, where the Bible says there were great trees, including one called Moreh, meaning 'the place of oracle'. It is here that God first appears to Abram, and God tells him, 'This is the place for you.'

Abram builds an altar to the Lord, possibly beneath the branches of Moreh, the great tree, and it becomes a significant waymark for Abram's descendants. For example, 175 years later, Jacob returns, digs a well, settles there and buries all his household gods, saying 'only God will be my

God.’ And then, 800 years later, Joshua returns to Shechem and sets up another altar, perhaps within sight of Abram’s.

Ask

What have been the waymarks – the significant spiritual places and moments – in my life so far? As I think of these, I ask myself, how did God appear to me? What did God say to me, or call me to do?

Pause and pray

As I think about my family and friends, my neighbors and colleagues, who do I know who needs God to appear to them today, perhaps for the very first time. *I ask You, God, to reveal Yourself to them.*

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’ So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

From there he went on towards the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the Lord.

Then Abram set out and continued towards the Negev.

Genesis 12:4–9

Abram pitched a tent for himself – something temporary – but he built an altar to the Lord something permanent – that would outlast him.

As I reflect on this, I remember that Jesus said, ‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven’ (Matt. 6:19–20).

What am I building for the Lord that will outlast me?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, I yield to Your call on my life. I know You choose me to bear fruit that will last – who knows, maybe for 800 years?

Yielding Promise

Thank You, Lord, that You promise that when I seek first Your kingdom and righteousness, that You will provide what I need (Matt. 6:33).

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.*

*Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.*

*Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.*

Amen.

August 28 2020 (click for audio)

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of rescue and restoration, thank You for Your great and beautiful mission in the world. Here I am Lord, fill me with Your Spirit and send me.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's wonderful deeds, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 96...

Publish his glorious deeds among the nations.

Tell everyone about the amazing things he does.

Great is the LORD! He is most worthy of praise!

He is to be feared above all gods.

Psalm 96:3–4

Pause and pray

Today, I continue to reflect on the story of Abram in the book of Genesis. Abram and Lot had both prospered so much that the land could no longer sustain both of their communities and their livestock. They decided to separate and settle in different places.

The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, 'Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring for ever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.'

So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.

Genesis 13:14–18

Lot and Abram had accumulated a lot of stuff and thousands of animals. Perhaps inevitably, competition and quarreling began to break out between their herders, and it became increasingly hard for them to live so close to one another. In order to make peace, Abram suggested that they separate, and he offered Lot first choice of the land. Lot chose the plains of Jordan near Sodom where the land was fertile.

After he'd gone, God spoke to Abram, 'Look around from where you are... All that you see, I will give to you'.

Ask

It's easy for me to look at other people's stuff and compare it to what I've got (or haven't got). Sometimes what other people have looks better, more 'fertile', than what I have.

Maybe God is saying to me today what He said to Abram, ‘Look around from where you are...’
What has God given to me? I take a few moments to thank God for all that He has given.

Pause and pray

As I think about the world today, I am aware that there are people whose homelands are being taken away from them or they are having to leave because of conflicts or natural disasters.

I ask You, God, to make peace; to care for those without homes.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I listen out for what God might be saying to me about the land, the town or village, or even the nation where I live.

The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, ‘Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring for ever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.’

So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.

Genesis 13:14–18

God’s invitation and God’s promise to Abram is also true for me today. ‘Go, walk the length and breadth of your neighborhood. Walk the streets, past the schools, the police station, the shops, the church buildings. I am giving you this land. It’s yours... because it is mine!’

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Thank You, God, for all that You give to me. I receive it in faith, while also acknowledging that it is all Yours – the earth is Yours, and everything in it. I surrender all that I have, and where I am, to You.

Yielding Promise

I praise You, God, for Your promise of generosity and provision in Philippians: ‘And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus’ (Phil. 4:19).

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.*

*Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.*

*Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.*

Amen.

August 29 2020 (click for audio)

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of rescue and restoration, thank You for Your great and beautiful mission in the world. Here I am Lord, fill me with Your Spirit and send me.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's holiness, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 96...

*Worship the LORD in all his holy splendor.
Let all the earth tremble before him.
Tell all the nations, "The LORD reigns!"
The world stands firm and cannot be shaken.
He will judge all peoples fairly
Psalm 96:9–10*

Pause and pray

Today, I am continuing to reflect on the life of Abram – now called Abraham – as told in the book of Genesis. Today's reading centers on the fascinating and disturbing story of Abraham bargaining with the Lord for the future of Sodom and Gomorrah.

*Then the LORD said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.'
The men turned away and went towards Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. Then Abraham approached him and said: 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?'
The LORD said, 'If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.'
Genesis 18:20–26*

Nearly 20 years ago, a British newspaper published an article about the Spanish island of Ibiza. It talked about the thousands of young holidaymakers who routinely drank so much alcohol that they ended up passing-out on the streets or having unprotected sex with complete strangers. It talked about the high levels of drug-use to fuel all-night clubbing, and about prostitution and violence. The headline of the article called Ibiza the new 'Sodom and Gomorrah'.

Just like the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Ibiza did not have a great reputation. However, when Pete Greig read the newspaper article, his response was to pray. 'God, are You speaking to us?' he asked. 'If this is You, open a door for us in Ibiza.'

Doors indeed began to open, and ever since then, 24-7 Prayer teams have been praying with, and serving, people in Ibiza – and introducing some of them to Jesus too. (You can read some of the stories in Brian Heasley's book, *Gatecrashing*.)

**Gatecrashing* (Muddy Pearl: Edinburgh, 2014)

Ask

Jesus always went to the places where the need for hope and healing was greatest – and He still does the same today.

Where might God be speaking to me or maybe even sending me?

I ask You, God, to open doors for me, to appoint and anoint me to help and heal the sick, to protect the vulnerable, to bind up the broken-hearted and set the captives free, in Jesus name.

Pause and pray

In my town or city, which places or groups of people are given labels by other people, in the same way that the British media labeled Ibiza?

I ask You, God, to send workers into these harvest fields. And dare I repeat Isaiah's prayer? 'Here am I, send me?' (Isa. 6:8).

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

Then the LORD said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.'

The men turned away and went towards Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. Then Abraham approached him and said: 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?'

The LORD said, 'If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.'

Genesis 18:20–26

Abraham continued to negotiate, and he eventually asked what the Lord would do if there were only ten righteous people in the city. 'For the sake of ten,' the Lord replied, 'I will not destroy it.'

I wonder why Abraham stopped at ten? Although he is described as being a ‘friend of God’, was Abraham nervous about bargaining with God? Perhaps he presumed that Lot’s family must number at least ten, and so stopping there would be enough to save the city? Sadly, it wasn’t, and Scripture tells us that only four people were rescued – Lot, his wife and his two daughters.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Heavenly Father, I know that my own hands aren’t clean, and my heart isn’t pure. If I were living in Sodom or Gomorrah at that time, would I be counted among the righteous?

Jesus, I am deeply, profoundly grateful for Your love and forgiveness. As I surrender myself to You, I join with millions of Your people around the world who pray The Jesus Prayer every day: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Yielding Promise

Jesus, today I receive Your promise that, because of Your death and resurrection, when I confess my sins, You are faithful and will forgive me (1 John 1:9).

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.*

*Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.*

*Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.
Amen.*

August 30 2020 (click for audio)

Today, on this day of rest, we interrupt our usual pattern with a shorter, simpler time of prayer. 'Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; but on the Sabbath,' writes Rabbi Abraham Heschel, 'we care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul.'

As I settle into prayer now, Lord, show me what it means to 'care for the seed of eternity in the soul'. Help me to stop counting the minutes, to relinquish control. Inspire me to live and breathe with greater ease, as an eternal being loved by You.

Pause and pray

This week, I've been exploring the biblical priority of mission, but today I stop striving to save the world and instead make space for the Lord to preach the gospel to me, to come and save me.

Sunday is a day to be born again – again! And so, I take time now to get right with God, to repent of my sins, to give thanks for the cross, to receive the Spirit once more.

Pause and pray

Turning my attention outwards, I pray for the gospel community as it gathers today:

Lord, You told us to ask the Father to send out workers to bring in the harvest. This we do.

Please ignite a renewed passion for the gospel in our lives and a sense of urgency in our churches. May preachers preach the way of salvation clearly today, so that many might see and fear and put their trust in You. Mobilise us as a missionary movement, wherever we live and to every tribe and tongue.

Holy Spirit, revive us again. Come to us once more as You came to that first prayer room in Jerusalem that we might be propelled out of our meetings and on to the streets with new courage, to preach the gospel, that thousands might encounter the resurrected Savior, Jesus Christ.

I take a moment now to earth these big prayers in my own life, naming friends, family members or colleagues who don't yet know Jesus. I ask for opportunities to share the hope that I have with at least one of these people this week.

Pause and pray

Finally, I dedicate myself afresh to the mission of God:

Thank You, Father, that You loved the world so much that You sent Your only Son,

Please help me to love the world with extraordinary generosity.

Thank You, Jesus, that You gave up everything and died for me.

Please help me to lay down my life for those who don't yet know You.

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for giving those first disciples such courage and power.

Please fill me now with that same boldness this week.

Pause and pray

Sabbath blessing

May this day bring sabbath rest to my heart and my home.

May God's image in me be restored, and my imagination in God be re-storied.

May the gravity of material things be lightened, and the relativity of time slow down.

May I know grace to embrace my own finite smallness in the arms of God's infinite greatness.

May God's Word feed me and his Spirit lead me into the week and into the life to come.

August 31 2020 (click for audio)

The First Day

How do the Scriptures inform our conversations and excite our imaginations as we dream of a world without racial injustice and inequality?

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Father God, open my eyes, stir my heart and teach me how, 'To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with...' You today (Micah 6:8).

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's greatness today, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 145...

Great is the LORD! He is most worthy of praise!

No one can measure his greatness.

Let each generation tell its children of your mighty acts;

Let them proclaim your power

Psalm 145:3–4

Pause and pray

How is reconciliation possible? How can relationships be restored? How can we come together? I reflect today on a powerful passage in Philippians that shows me the way forward. The way of descent. The way of humility.

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others. In relationship with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:1–5

How do we deal with issues of racial reconciliation in our churches? It needs to start with us – we must deal with it in-house if we have any hope to bring reconciliation to the world.

Paul shows us how we can have this unity in the Spirit. The solution is that we don't look out for our own selves, but for the person beside us who may look different, act different, be different.

Ask

Abba Father, have there been times where I have done things only for my own benefit, focused only on things that matter to me?

Help me, Father, to see the beauty and power of focusing on others, so that I may walk as Christ Jesus did. Could You speak to me now, and show me where I'm considering myself more than others?

Pause and pray

Father, we ask You to help us to celebrate diversity of music, culture, language and expression within and among our churches. Help us not only to accept what is unfamiliar but receive it with great joy!

In the quiet, I name the churches in my area and I pray for them now.

Pause and pray**Yield**

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear Your Word, and my heart to yield to Your will once again.

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others. In relationship with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:1–5

For Jesus, the way of humility led Him to the cross – to death. In order for the Church to display the beauty of a diverse group of people united around the presence of Christ, we have to die to our interests and ambitions.

Pause and pray**Yielding Prayer**

Father, I die to my own preferences. I die to my own selfish agendas. I even die to my selfish ambitions and vain conceits. Teach me the way of humility.

Yielding Promise

Today, I rest in God's promise in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that I am being transformed into His very image by the Spirit of the Lord.

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.

Amen.