

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 select the day page then right-click the date and set your screen for two separate windows

December 2020

December 1	December 2	December 3	December 4
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Audio for Each Day in MP3 Format

[Month of December 2020](#)

By opening a PDF version from above along with the appropriate audio selection you should be able to read and listen at the same time with two different windows open.

December 01 2020 (click for audio)

Proclamation & Restoration

Together, in the midst of this unusual Advent, we pray, O Come Emmanuel.

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 anticipation of Jesus’ arrival. ‘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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God’s unfailing love today, joining in the ancient hope of all God’s people in the words of Psalm 33...

But the Lord watches over those who fear him,
those who rely on his unfailing love.
He rescues them from death and keeps them alive in times of famine.
We put our hope in the Lord. He is our help and our shield.
In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.
Let your unfailing love surround us, Lord, for our hope is in you alone.
Psalm 33: 18-22

Pause and pray

Can you imagine this scene from Luke 4:18: Jesus rocks up to synagogue, gets up in front of the congregation, opens the scroll of the book of Isaiah, reads this passage and then says ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’ It’s a mic drop moment. And the crowd goes wild, but not in a good way!

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor
Isaiah 61:1-2a

Isaiah 61 is a Messianic prophecy that speaks of a leader – the Servant of the Lord who has an astounding mandate! Declaring good news and displaying the power of God through dramatic works

of healing and deliverance. When Jesus claims that passage as his job description, his community was enraged. Who does he think he is?

Ask

God would you help me bind up the broken-hearted when hearts are breaking all around me? In a time when my newsfeed is flooded with bad news, how might I both bring and be good news today?

Pause and Pray

Father, I pray for those right now who are captive – in particular I pray for victims of human trafficking and those entrapped in the sex trade. Jesus be good news to them. Bring freedom - complete freedom of body, soul and spirit – and release them from darkness 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.

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor

Isaiah 61:1-2a

Jesus didn't have a messiah complex – he actually was the fulfillment of this promise from Isaiah. He laid hold of this ancient prophecy and spent the rest of his life living into it. And he invites me to do the same.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Today, I ask that your Spirit would be upon me in the same way that it was upon Jesus. I yield myself to the life of Your Spirit within me and I give myself to the mandate of proclamation and restoration.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, I take hold of your promise that '...the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom'. 2 Corinthians 3:17

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.

December 02 2020 (click for audio)

New Covenant

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's protection today, joining in the ancient hope of all God's people in the words of Psalm 62...

I wait quietly before God,
for my victory comes from him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress where I will never be shaken.
Psalm 62: 1-2 & 6

Pause and pray

Today's passage is from the book Jeremiah. God's people are in captivity, but the prophet is promising future freedom, life and hope.

"The days are coming," declares the Lord,
"when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah...
"I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the Lord.
"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."
Jeremiah 31:31,33b-34

I love how active God is in this passage:

'I will make...

I will put...

I will be...

I will forgive..'

God is not passive and powerless, but active and mighty to save.

I have a friend who once practiced Tibetan Buddhism. He had a relationship with a spiritual entity who required from him a long, convoluted and arduous path to enlightenment. When my friend heard about Jesus, he decided instead to become a Christian, 'Not only is Jesus a more powerful entity,' he said, 'But Jesus does all the work for me! I just get to receive!'

Ask

Is my relationship with Jesus characterized by striving - 'just try harder!' Or is it characterized by receiving? God I'm sorry for when, like a toddler, I say 'I can do it all by myself!' I let go of striving and today I position myself to receive.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for those who are ensnared in religions that require endless self effort to please false gods and serve idols. Lord, may they hear the good news and encounter Jesus. Would you be their God and may they be your people, and enjoy all the benefits of being Yours.

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 days are coming," declares the Lord,
"when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah...
"I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the Lord.
"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more."

Jeremiah 31:31,33b-34

What Jesus promises is not behavior modification, but transformation. Holiness from the inside out. The good news is not that we get to be better people, but that we get to be a new creation, alive to the presence of God by His indwelling Holy Spirit. C.S. Lewis says it this way.

'For mere improvement is not redemption, though redemption always improves people even here and now and will, in the end, improve them to a degree we cannot yet imagine. God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better but like turning a horse into a winged creature.*

*LEWIS, C.S.. C. S. LEWIS CHRISTIAN COLLECTION: Nine books including: Mere Christianity; Screwtape Letters; Miracles; The Great Divorce; Pilgrim's Recess; The Problem ... (Timeless Wisdom Collection Book 1016) . Business and Leadership Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I yield myself to your hidden, transforming work deep inside the hidden parts of me. Come, Lord Jesus. Forgive my wickedness. Forget my sin. Write your law on my heart. I belong to you forever.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!'

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.

December 03 2020 (click for audio)

Francis Xavier: Hero of Mission

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.

These are: **Prayer and Creativity, Justice and Hospitality, Learning and Mission.** Today therefore we are thanking God for the extraordinary example of Francis Xavier, a pioneering hero of Mission.

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 in God's direction and guidance today, joining in the ancient hope of all God's people in the words of Psalm 25...

Show me the right path, O Lord;
point out the road for me to follow.
Lead me by your truth and teach me,
for you are the God who saves me.
All day long I put my hope in you.
Psalm 25:4-5

Pause and pray

Francis Xavier, one of the founding fathers of the Jesuit Order, is celebrated as the Patron Saint of missionaries. He was instrumental in the establishment of Christianity in Asia and is said to have baptized around 30,000 people in his lifetime. He is credited with the idea that the missionary must adapt to the culture and language of the people they are ministering to. Today I celebrate his courage, pioneering creativity in mission and the extraordinary impact of a life dedicated to sharing the good news of Jesus.

Francis, this great hero of mission once said: 'Be great in little things'

As I reflect on his life today, I wonder how this wisdom was reflected in his approach to mission.

When Francis Xavier first arrived as a missionary in Goa he was just 26 years old. I can't imagine the courage it would have taken to step off that boat... or to know where to start! Francis chose to begin his mission by ministering to the sick in local hospitals and teaching people in the streets: particularly children and servants.

From these small beginnings Francis went on to plant almost 40 churches in India before moving on across South East Asia and ultimately baptizing thousands.

Francis is a great example of a pioneering missionary to far-away lands, but as a Christian I am called to share the Gospel wherever I find myself. As I start each day, I too 'step off the boat,' and look at the opportunities ahead to serve God and the people around me. Francis' advice to be great in little things is an encouragement that today, whatever I find myself doing, whoever I find myself with, I have the opportunity to do small things with great love.

Ask

As I reflect on Francis stepping off the boat and choosing to serve whoever God placed in front of him, I think ahead to my day. What person or task feels too little or unimportant for me today? How might I serve God greatly in these little things?

Lord, give me eyes to see where you are at work in both the big and small parts of my day.

Pause and pray

Francis' decision to dedicate his life to mission changed the world for so many people and it continues to inspire others into mission, even to this day. But it cost him everything. Is there anything I am still holding on to that is stopping me today from 'getting on the boat'; giving myself fully to the plan that God has for my life?

God, help me to see the lost and hurting people in my city. I pray today that you would give me courage to spend my life on behalf of others.

Pause and pray

Yield

Yielding Prayer

Thank you, God that through the story of Francis Xavier I can see the extraordinary impact of a life fully surrendered to you. As I surrender myself to you once again, give me the courage to let go of anything that is holding me back. Please help me to serve you faithfully in every moment of my day, with every person I meet, trusting that through these little things, you can do great things in this world.

Yielding Promise

God as I serve you today I trust in the promise that your word does not return to you empty but accomplishes what you desire. (Isaiah 55:11).

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.

[December 04 2020 \(click for audio\)](#)

Another Kind of King

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's help today, joining in the ancient hope of all God's people in the words of Psalm 94...

Unless the Lord had helped me,
I would soon have settled in the silence of the grave.
I cried out, "I am slipping!"
but your unfailing love, O Lord, supported me.
When doubts filled my mind,
your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer.

Psalm 94:17-19

Pause and pray

Today's passage is from the book of Daniel. Daniel has a dream and in it he sees different beasts that represent the different empires. And at the end of the dream he sees God seated on a throne. Daniel calls him the Ancient of Days.

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Daniel 7:13-14

Are there empires ruling the earth right now? China is ascending in power and influence. Giant corporations span the earth. Sometimes the American President is called the ruler of the free world. And it seems as if almost everybody has an iPhone!

Daniel had been displaced and enslaved by a hostile empire, and was longing for another kind of king.

Ask

God, do I feel more like I'm being held captive by earthly empires in some shape or form, or am I under the dominion of a King and His Kingdom?

In the quiet I ask that you would show me where I may have given my allegiance to lesser rulers, be they economic, cultural or national. I repent and offer you my full allegiance.

Pause and pray

Today I pray for the church in China as they face fresh waves of persecution. I ask You for boldness for Christians and Christian leaders in China: those in prison and those under harassment. I ask for Christ to reveal Himself to government officials. And I pray for Jesus' teachings to take deep root in the hearts of the Chinese people and the Chinese culture.

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.

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Daniel 7:13-14

In the gospels, Jesus repeatedly referred to Himself as the Son of Man. Empires rise and fall but His dominion will not pass away. His kingdom will never be destroyed. And as the prophet Isaiah said, 'Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end'. (Isa 9:7)

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I yield myself to your good leadership across the ages, over all the nations, and in my own heart and life. You are my great hope.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, I lean into the promise that, 'my hope comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I shall not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge'. (Psalm 62:1-2)

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.

[December 05 2020 \(click for audio\)](#)

Lion and King

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the highest heavens.
You have done such wonderful things.
Who can compare with you, O God?
You have allowed me to suffer much hardship,
but you will restore me to life again
and lift me up from the depths of the earth.
You will restore me to even greater honor
and comfort me once again.

Psalm 71:19-21

Pause and pray

Today's reading is from the book of Genesis. In that culture, when the family patriarch is dying, he speaks a blessing over each of his children. Here is the blessing of the Patriarch Jacob over his son Judah.

Judah, your brothers will praise you;
your hand will be on the neck of your enemies;
your father's sons will bow down to you.
You are a lion's cub, Judah;
you return from the prey, my son.
Like a lion he crouches and lies down,
like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?
The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until he to whom it belongs shall come
and the obedience of the nations shall be his.

Genesis 49:8-10

Jacob prophesies that Judah would rule and reign over his brothers, and that he would carry the scepter – the ruler's staff. It's a symbol of authority and kingship.

Charles Spurgeon also says of this passage that THESE words were spoken by the Patriarch Jacob when he blessed his sons as he lay dying. But before he finished Judah's blessing, the good old man seemed to forget his son and to turn his thoughts to Jesus, our Lord, of whom Judah was a very significant type.*

*Charles Spurgeon (No. 3296), A sermon published on Thursday, April 4, 1912. Delivered by C. H. SPURGEON, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, on Lord's-Day evening, February 25, 1866.

Later in Israel's history, David, who is from the tribe of Judah, is crowned King. The subsequent kings came from that tribe... including Jesus.

Ask

Many of us today live in countries that don't have kings, or where royalty are treated as figureheads without any real authority.

What comes to mind when I think of Jesus as king? God, In the quiet, I ask You to bring to mind areas of my life where I'm treating You as a mere figurehead with no real authority. I ask you to show me what Your rule and reign might look like in my life today.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for the nations and for the rulers of the earth. I'm reminded of Psalm 2:1:2

Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed...

Where nations and leaders are in conspiracy against You, God, we ask that Your rightful rule would be recognized and Your kingdom established.

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.

Judah, your brothers will praise you;
your hand will be on the neck of your enemies;
your father's sons will bow down to you.
You are a lion's cub, Judah;
you return from the prey, my son.
Like a lion he crouches and lies down,
like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?
'The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until he to whom it belongs shall come
and the obedience of the nations shall be his.

Genesis 49:8-10

In Revelation 5:5, Jesus is described as the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

I remember as an unchurched child being entranced by C.S. Lewis' children's books, the Narnia chronicles. I particularly loved Aslan the lion, the Christ figure in those stories, and gave my heart to him many years before I was introduced to Jesus Himself. Aslan was famously described in the books this way:

"Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion."

"Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he- quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"...

"Safe?" said Mr Beaver..."Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."**

** Lewis, C. S.. THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA – Complete Collection: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe + Prince Caspian + The Voyage of the Dawn Treader + The Silver Chair ... Battle...: Classics of Children's Literature . e-artnow. Kindle Edition.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

King of the nations. Lion of the tribe of Judah. I put my hope in you. I yield my heart to your goodness and your good leadership again today.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, I trust in the promise in Psalm 16:8, 'I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.'

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.

[**December 06 2020 \(click for audio\)**](#)

A Sabbath Prayer for Advent

As I journey towards Christmas, I prepare my heart for Christ's coming using the words of the ancient prayer of the church:

'Maranatha, come Lord Jesus'.

I repeat these words now:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

Turning my attention now to focus on my own heart, I may become aware of sinful thoughts, words or deeds in my life, and I simply acknowledge them now before You, Lord, and I pray for my own life:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

And now I turn my thoughts to think of someone who needs Christ's love today. I name them before You and pray for them:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

Next, I think about my own local church family and the many activities we have planned in this Christmas season, whether they are in person or online, and I pray, again for us:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

Finally, I think of a place in the world right now that desperately needs Your comfort, and I pray for that place, that situation, those people:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

Way back in the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux, who was the founder of the Cistercian order of monks, said that Christ comes to us in three different ways: firstly, in Bethlehem at Christmas; secondly, at the end of the age; and thirdly, in the lives of believers every single day. So, let's pray for all three of Christ's comings this Advent:

Thank You, Father, for loving us so much that You sent Your Son to save us.

Maranatha. May Jesus be born again amongst us this Christmas.

Thank You, Jesus, that You came before and You are coming again in glory.

Maranatha. We long for You to return and make all things new.

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for filling my life.

Maranatha. May the Lord Jesus Christ be born again in me today.

A Sabbath Blessing

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

May my peace and perspective be renewed in the busyness of this season.

May my hand be free enough from spending and acquiring to receive Your gift.

May a little of the wonder and magic of Christmas awaken the child within me today.

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

December 07 2020 (click for audio)

The Fulfillment of Hope

Together we will reflect on Messianic prophecies written centuries before Jesus' birth.

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's protection, love and blessing today, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 5...

But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them sing joyful praises forever.
Spread your protection over them,
that all who love your name may be filled with joy.
For you bless the godly, O Lord;
you surround them with your shield of love.
Psalm 5:11-12

Pause and pray

God knows the reality of deep suffering all across this broken world. Yet even in the midst of oppression, He speaks hope into the darkness. Today I reflect on God's promise for redemption spoken through the prophet Isaiah that is for now, and is yet to come...

Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and for ever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this. Isaiah 9:5-7

This familiar passage – often read at Carol services - begins with an image of war, yet moves directly into the promise of peace through the birth of Jesus.

What does it mean to live in the reality of injustice, oppression and violence, and hold onto the promise that, one day, all things will be set right? How do I live two truths—this current brokenness, and a future in which all is made whole?

To be authentic in both our world and in God's Kingdom means I cannot look away from either reality.

Ask

Do I focus on one reality and 'forget' the other? Am I easily overwhelmed by the brokenness and darkness of this world, prone to cynicism and even despair? Or do I become so future-focused, I neglect to engage with the needs around me?

Just God, Prince of Peace, teach me to work for justice while filled with hope. I open myself to Your peace now.

Pause and pray

God, today I think of Christians I know around the world giving their lives pursuing justice for the oppressed. I name some of them now. Please renew their stamina and hope, granting them comfort and joy.

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.

Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and for ever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.
Isaiah 9:5-7

God's promise of total redemption came to us as a baby. The complete answer to all our needs arrived as an infant, unable to 'accomplish' anything. For thirty years, the answer was present among us, but was not yet known to the world.

In this Advent season of longing, when I celebrate the hope that arrived that first Christmas, and look to the fulfillment of hope to come; I choose to nurture hope and give thanks that You have already provided everything for the healing of the world.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I have my own ideas of what I think Your timing should be, but today, I yield to Your timing as you accomplish justice, righteousness and peace. I lament the darkness around me and I look with hope to Your light.

Yielding Promise

Lord, thank You that Jesus is the promised light that shows me who You are. (Luke 2:32) I step into this day with expectation, watching for glimmers of Your beautiful, healing light.

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.

December 08 2020 (click for audio)

Healed and Restored

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. ‘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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God’s redemptive power, joining in the ancient praise of all God’s people in Psalm 103...

He forgives all my sins
and heals all my diseases.
He redeems me from death
and crowns me with love and tender mercies.
He fills my life with good things.
My youth is renewed like the eagle’s!
Psalm 103:3-5

Pause and pray

As I continue into the Advent season and my preparation for Christmas, I reflect on another Old Testament prophecy about Jesus. In today’s reading, I meet Abram. His life is about to be uprooted by a challenging command, and a very big promise from God.

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 Haran.
Genesis 12:1-4

The first thing we learn about Abram is that when God made a very big ask of him, he obeyed. This obedience released incredible blessing not just to him, but to the entire world, and today Abram is a revered patriarch in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Heroes of the faith can be intimidating.

It helps me to remember that Abram was human. His journey of obedience went on to include courage and cowardice, faithfulness and deceit. He was not perfect, but God used him anyway.

Ask

It's easy for me to get discouraged on the journey. I can obsess over my failures and I sometimes forget that God's love is new every morning. (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Lord, I give You the discouragements and failures I'm wrestling with today. Help me not to give up obeying and following You because I make mistakes. I receive Your love anew now.

Pause and pray

Lord, I ask that You encourage friends I know who are feeling particularly defeated as they follow You. Don't let them buy the lie that they are disqualified, unaccepted or unloved. Open their eyes to Your never-ending grace. I name some of 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.

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 Apostle Paul tells us that God considered Abram (now called Abraham) righteous because he believed God's promise, not because he obeyed God perfectly. Though childless, Abram believed God when he said he would father a nation that would bless the world, and he did.

Jesus is a direct descendant of this imperfect old man. Through Jesus, our broken relationship with God is healed and restored. I can't think of a bigger, better or more far reaching global blessing.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I yield to Your asks, Your prompts and Your direction, trusting that my less than perfect obedience is received by You with joy. I choose to believe Your promises for my life, and I walk forward with renewed faith.

Yielding Promise

Lord, You've promised to use faith even as small as a mustard seed. (Matthew 17:20) I admit that my faith level

can vary, impacted by my circumstances and emotions. Thank You for not holding my human-ness against me as I follow you into this 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.

December 09 2020 (click for audio)

God's Image

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's guidance today, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 25...

Show me the right path, O Lord;
point out the road for me to follow.
Lead me by your truth and teach me,
for you are the God who saves me.
All day long I put my hope in you.

Psalm 25:4-5

Pause and pray

In today's reading, the Children of Israel are about to cross into the promised land. Moses, who will not be going with them, is instructing them on how to live in their new home. He relays God's promise to give them a prophet whose words will come directly from God...

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, 'Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire any more, or we will die.'

The Lord said to me: 'What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.'

Deuteronomy 18:15-18

Imagine this: the God of the universe chooses to speak to me in ways I can hear and understand. God's promise to Israel of a prophet from among their brothers means He is speaking their language, from within their culture.

Also, God is giving them a prophet because they found His raw presence totally overwhelming. God, who always wants to communicate with me, meets me in my context and within my human limitations.

Ask

Lord, I need to hear from You. As I pause, remind me of times You have spoken clearly to me. I'm thankful for those times. As I continue walking with You, please improve my hearing and increase my sensitivity to Your voice. I listen for You today...

Pause and pray

God, there are many who don't seem to hear You; those who don't believe, and those who do, but struggle to hear. I name people I know who need to hear Your voice of love today. Would You speak clearly to 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.

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, 'Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire any more, or we will die.'

The Lord said to me: 'What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.'

Deuteronomy 18:15-18

Jesus is the prophet that God promised. And He is more than that. The Apostle Paul tells us that Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God, and that God happily allowed all his fullness to dwell in Him. (Colossians 1:15&19)

Jesus is a little like God's selfie - God himself, in human form. When I see Jesus, I see the Father; the more time I spend looking to Him, the fuller my knowledge of God.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I confess that busyness often keeps me from taking time to just gaze at You. I look to You, Jesus. I yield my plans and schedule. Open my eyes to see You afresh.

Yielding Promise

God, You've promised to give wisdom and to speak knowledge and understanding to me. (Proverbs 2: 6). You've promised that your sheep hear your voice, (John 10:27.). I enter this day with expectation, listening for Your voice as I go.

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.

December 10 2020 (click for audio)

A Hope Filled Future

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's protection today, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 121...

The Lord keeps you from all harm
and watches over your life.
The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go,
both now and forever.
Psalm 121:7-8

Pause and pray

God knows how easily people lose faith. Today's reading is a prophecy that is a word of encouragement meant to strengthen the Children of Israel and help them envision a future filled with hope...

Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;
say to those with fearful hearts,
'Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come,
he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution
he will come to save you.'
Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.
Isaiah 35:3-6

The works of healing and other miracles are often referred to as 'signs and wonders.' When Jesus healed a leper or blind person, raised a child from the dead, or multiplied meager supplies to feed thousands, the miracle was not an end in itself, meant for just that person or moment. Rather, it carried a two-fold intent.

Miracles provide immediate help within a specific time and context, and they are signs of God's Kingdom come. They reveal His presence now, and His coming Kingdom.

Ask

Have I experienced any miraculous, unexplainable God events, big or small, that caused me to feel God's care, and reminded me that His Kingdom is near?

God, I ask You to remind me of those now and give thanks for when You feel very close and real.

Pause and pray

I think now about situations in this world, locally and globally, that need a miraculous breakthrough. I name people and places where I long to see You work supernaturally.

God, bring healing, reveal Your power and love, demonstrate Your sovereignty and set wrongs right.

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.

Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;
say to those with fearful hearts,
'Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come,
he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution
he will come to save you.'

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.

Isaiah 35:3-6

It raises the hair on my arms to hear the power behind the words, 'He will come to save you.' It is a mighty rescue that arrived in the gentle touch with which Jesus healed, the quiet word he spoke to still a storm, or the simple instruction he gave allowing a lame man to walk.

His rescue and salvation also include blessing for the land... Streams in the desert... the earth renewed. Jesus brings shalom (he puts all things right) in every sphere. This Advent, it seems like these promises are especially comforting for our world.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I long to see You move in my life. I yield to any and every way You want to break through supernaturally (or naturally) in my life. Help me partner with You to bring Your shalom to people around me today.

Yielding Promise

God of rescue who promises to come and save, I walk into this day holding onto the hope that one day soon You will wipe every tear from my eyes as You make all things new. (Rev 21:4-5)

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.

December 11 2020 (click for audio)

Boundless, Faithful Love

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

Today, I choose to rejoice in God's justice, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in Psalm 10...

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 10:17-18

Pause and pray

Today, I am exploring the story of Exodus, where the Children of Israel have been slaves in Egypt for generations. God has sent plague after plague to convince Pharaoh to listen to Moses and release this captive nation. Today I reflect on the passage where God explains the final and most drastic plague, and what the Israelites need to do to stay safe...

Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household... Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the door-frames of the houses where they eat the lambs... 'On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

Exodus 12:3,7,12-13

Israel celebrated this saving act of God annually through a festival called Passover. When Jesus and His disciples shared the Passover meal before His death, this remembrance ritual had existed for over 1,000 years.

The disciples knew that the lamb's blood had saved their ancestors all those centuries ago. Now, in the following hours, when Jesus was beaten, bloodied and killed, did they remember what John the Baptist had said as Jesus approached? 'Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29) Did they understand that Jesus was the new and ultimate Passover Lamb, not just for them, but for all humanity.

Ask

Lord, I confess that I often take for granted what You sacrificed in order for me to enjoy this relationship with You. I take time to thank You again, in my own words, for being the Passover Lamb that gives me life.

Pause and pray

Jesus, Lamb of God, I pray now for friends and family who have heard of You but have not understood who You are and the rescue You offer. Would you cause a smoldering; a fire to catch as they begin to understand Your love. I name specific people 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.

Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household... Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the door-frames of the houses where they eat the lambs... 'On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.
Exodus 12:3,7,12-13

Unlike the lambs slaughtered at the first Passover, Jesus chose the path that took him to His death. He knew what lay ahead, and He walked willingly toward it anyway. Jesus endured unfathomable suffering so that I can enjoy freedom and full relationship with God.

It's beyond belief, but it turns out Anna Bartlett's incredibly simple 161 year old lyric is true, 'Yes, Jesus loves me.*

* Susan Warner and Anna Bartlett Warner, *Say and Seal* (Lippincott & Company, 1860) pp 115-116

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, today I yield again to Your incredible love for me. I let the truth of it drop from up in my head where I intellectually accept it, down into my emotional center where I begin to actually feel it.

Yielding Promise

I celebrate today that Your love reaches to the heaven, Your faithfulness to the skies. (Psalm 36:5) I open myself again today to this boundless, faithful love.

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.

December 12 2020 (click for audio)

A Gentle King

This Advent, we are praying O Come Emmanuel, and exploring Messianic prophecies throughout the Old Testament, written about Jesus centuries before his birth.

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's greatness today, joining in 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

In today's reading, God is again speaking hope and the promise of future good, during a period of many wars...

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
and the war-horses from Jerusalem,
and the battle-bow will be broken.
He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
Zechariah 9:9-10

I'm preparing for Christmas but this prophecy reminds me of the events leading up to Easter. Did Jesus have this scripture in mind as he entered Jerusalem on a donkey? I don't know for certain, but I do know God had Jesus in mind as he spoke of a gentle king who would bring lasting peace.

The Kingdom of God is powerful, establishing righteousness and salvation, but its hallmark, its ethos, its vibe is peace. Am I a person of peace? Am I gentle with the people around me?

Ask

Lord, I like being right. I want the record set straight when I'm doubted, wrongly accused or simply misunderstood. I confess that I'm often more concerned with recognition and affirmation than I am with extending gentleness and peace. Where would You like to work with me in this area even today?

Pause and pray

Lord, I think of churches and communities of believers in my local area. I pray for a collective generous gentleness that is winsome and irresistible, drawing people into Your love. I pray blessings on local bodies of believers now. May we be fragrant with your peace.

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.

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
and the war-horses from Jerusalem,
and the battle-bow will be broken.
He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
Zechariah 9:9-10

God set clues, like this passage, in the ancient texts of Israel so his children would recognize Jesus as Savior when he came.

What clues has God sprinkled through my life to help me see Jesus? Where have I seen evidence of God in recent days?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

The author of Hebrews tells me to 'fix [my] mind on Jesus.' (Hebrews 3:1) Lord, today I yield my distracted mind to the invitation to ponder you. In this busy season of present shopping, menu planning and adjusting plans to celebrate in the midst of Covid-19, help my fascination with You to increase daily, starting today.

Yielding Promise

Lord, You've promised to keep me not just in some peace, but perfect peace, when I trust You and fix my thoughts on You. (Isaiah 26:3) I welcome Your peace today, receiving it as the good gift it is.

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.

December 13 2020 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Prayer for Advent

As I journey towards Christmas, I prepare my heart for Christ's coming using the words of the ancient prayer of the church: '**Maranatha, come Lord Jesus**'.

I repeat these words now:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

Turning my attention now to focus on my own heart, I may become aware of sinful thoughts, words or deeds in my life, and I simply acknowledge them now before You, Lord, and I pray for my own life:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

And now I turn my thoughts to think of someone who needs Christ's love today. I name them before You and pray for them:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

Next, I think about my own local church family and the many activities we have planned in this Christmas season, whether they are in person or online, and I pray, again for us:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

Finally, I think of a place in the world right now that desperately needs Your comfort, and I pray for that place, that situation, those people:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Way back in the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux, who was the founder of the Cistercian order of monks, said that Christ comes to us in three different ways: firstly, in Bethlehem at Christmas; secondly, at the end of the age; and thirdly, in the lives of believers every single day. So, let's pray for all three of Christ's coming this Advent:

Thank You, Father, for loving us so much that You sent Your Son to save us.

Maranatha. May Jesus be born again amongst us this Christmas.

Thank You, Jesus, that You came before and You are coming again in glory.

Maranatha. We long for You to return and make all things new.

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for filling my life.

Maranatha. May the Lord Jesus Christ be born again in me today.

A Sabbath Blessing

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

May my peace and perspective be renewed in the busyness of this season.

May my hand be free enough from spending and acquiring to receive Your gift.

May a little of the wonder and magic of Christmas awaken the child within me today.

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

December 14 2020 (click for audio)

Prepare The Way

This week we continue to explore the extraordinary predictions about the coming of Jesus made centuries before his birth.

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in the good news of Advent - that the King of kings is on his way - joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 24:

Open up, ancient gates! Open up, ancient doors,
and let the King of glory enter. Who is the King of glory?
The Lord of Heaven's Armies— he is the King of glory. Psalm 24:9-10

Today I am reflecting on how I make space for the coming of God into my life.

The year is 539 B.C. For decades the people of Israel's Southern Kingdom has been exiled in Babylon, but now this cruel empire is collapsing before the invading Persian army. And it is into this turmoil that the words of the prophet Isaiah arise, speaking comfort to the troubled remnant.

A voice of one calling:

'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord
has spoken.'
Isaiah 40:3-5

The punctuation in this passage matters. Isaiah doesn't say 'A voice of one calling in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord.' Rather he says 'A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord.' Wilderness is part of the prophet's message. More than just a place, it is THE place. And not just for declaring some future hope but for preparing HERE and NOW. Why is it, I wonder, that God so often appears in unlikely places, at unexpected times to unsuspecting people?

Ask

Can I name the wilderness in my life? In what ways do I feel particularly dry, unproductive or ashamed right now? Isaiah says a surprising thing: instead of hiding and denying the unfruitful and unattractive parts of my world, I should actually get them ready to receive the coming King this Christmas.

Pause and pray

It's easy to get a bit obsessed with my own personal problems, but today I pray for the wilderness of despair in the Republic of Yemen, which is suffering the worst humanitarian disaster in the world. 2 million children severely malnourished. 20 million people facing famine. 3.65 million families displaced. Lord, I cry out to you now for an unexpected breakthrough in Yemen's civil war this Christmas. Raise up peacemakers in that region to bring comfort and hope. Strengthen your tiny church in that nation. And awaken western governments including my own to respond to the scale and urgency of this tragedy.

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.

A voice of one calling:

'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

Isaiah 40:3-5

Almost 600 years after Isaiah's prophecy, the people of Israel were still waiting for its complete fulfillment. By now they were once again living in their own land, but under a puppet king and in the brutal presence of occupying Roman legions.

And yet it is now, at this moment, when so many people have given up hope, Isaiah's prediction is about to come true. Mark's Gospel announces that the appearance of John the Baptist signaled nothing less than 'the beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God...A voice of one crying in the wilderness 'Prepare the way of the Lord" (Mark 1:1,3)

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Father, help me to embrace the wilderness as the place of transformation. As I find myself in a lonely place, instead of waiting for the wilderness to end, may it be here that I find you afresh and make a way for you to be seen in me.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, I am reminded of the words of Psalm 40:

I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry...
He put a new song in my mouth.
Psalm 40:1,3a

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.

December 15 2020 (click for audio)

God With Us

This week we continue to explore the extraordinary predictions about the coming of Jesus centuries before his birth.

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's life-long kindness to me, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the timeless 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

Today's reading will soon ring out in carol services around the world but the original prophecy, spoken by Isaiah some seven centuries before the birth of Christ, has a surprising context to say the least.

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, 'Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.'
But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.'
*Then Isaiah said, 'Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans?
Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the
virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.'*

Isaiah 7:10-14

The immediate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy to Ahaz, some seven centuries before its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, seems to have been that his own wife became pregnant with a son named Hezekiah who certainly did grow up to be a sign of Immanuel - God with us. It is written of Hezekiah that: "The Lord was with him." (2 Kings 18:7). God's word is fulfilled again and again in different ways in every generation, and always ultimately in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ask

I wonder why Ahaz was so reluctant to ask God for a sign even when he had been explicitly told to do so?
Is there anything God is telling me to do that I'm currently resisting?

Pause and pray

Is there anyone I know who seems to be living under the weight of an unfulfilled prophecy, or a deferred hope?
I take time now to ask that this Christmas they would see some sign of Immanuel, God with them, for 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.

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, 'Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.'

But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.'

Then Isaiah said, 'Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans?

Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:10-14

700 years after Isaiah's original prophecy, one of Ahaz's descendants is facing a crisis: His fiance is pregnant and he knows he's not the father. But then, as Matthew's Gospel records, "an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'" (Matthew 1:20-21)

Isaiah's rather stroppy prophecy to Ahaz is about to be fulfilled once again and this time it will bring to birth the transformation of the world!

Thank you Lord that the simple words I sometimes speak to others in your name can have an impact far beyond my imagination, my original intention and even my life itself.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I yield to your promise that you are Emmanuel – God with me – even in the face of crises I am facing now, and my anxiety for the future

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me asks in [Isaiah 49:15]:

'Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?
Though she may forget, I will not forget you!'

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.

December 16 2020 (click for audio)

Day of Reconciliation, RSA

On days like these we pause from praying the Bible to celebrate other stories which embody the six practices at the heart of Lectio 365. These are: Prayer and Creativity, Justice and Hospitality, Learning and Mission.

Today we are thanking God for the extraordinary way in which Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu set South Africa on a path to peace in the wake of systemic, institutionalized racism, through a process of Restorative Justice.

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in the reconciling peace of God, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 133...

*How wonderful and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in harmony!
Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon
that falls on the mountains of Zion.
And there the Lord has pronounced his blessing,
even life everlasting.
Psalm 133:1,3.*

In 1995, just as the nation of South Africa began to emerge from the trauma of the apartheid years, the new government set aside a day to promote and celebrate unity and reconciliation. December 16th was chosen because the date already held significance for all South Africans.

For Afrikaners, it was the Day of The Vow, the anniversary of the Voortrekkers' victory over the Zulus in the 1838 Battle of Blood River. For Black Africans it marked both the great protest in 1910 against racial discrimination, and the founding in 1961 of the armed wing of the ANC – a day of sabotage against the system of Apartheid.

And so it was that on this significant day, December 16th two blood-soaked traditions of violent resistance were radically re-purposed in the pursuit of peace.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu has consistently called the nation to both Truth and Reconciliation:

“Until we can forgive the person who harmed us, that person will hold the keys to our happiness; that person will be our jailer. When we forgive, we take back control of our own fate and our feelings. We become our own liberators. Forgiveness, in other words, is the best form of self-interest.”*

*<https://www.rd.com/article/desmond-tutu-forgive/>

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a revolutionary way for a nation to pursue justice. Rather than seeking retribution for the injuries of the apartheid years, it aimed to bring restoration. Both victims and violators were invited to give testimony and the former perpetrators of violence could seek amnesty and forgiveness.

Ask

I ask the Holy Spirit to show me now if I am holding onto bitterness or resentment in any area of my life? Am I keeping myself imprisoned by unforgiveness?

Pause and pray

Prince of Peace, on this significant day I acknowledge the ways in which racial injustice has been institutionalized in my own nation. Forgive us. Heal our ancient wounds. Raise us up as peacemakers. And help me, Lord, to be a courageous voice for truth and reconciliation in your name.

Pause and pray

Yield

In the first century, when the young Church in Corinth was encountering deep divisions, the apostle Paul wrote:

"God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 (NLT)

Nelson Mandela, who became the first leader of post-apartheid South Africa was prepared to live or die to see the nation grow into a free and fair democracy. The price he paid was 27 years in prison. Reconciliation is never cheap or easy.

Yielding Prayer

Father, I acknowledge that I am sometimes biased against people who are not like me. I'm sorry. Help me to learn from someone today who thinks or looks different to me.

Yielding Promise

Thank you that, as the apostle Paul says, you “tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance... [and] started over. Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, [you] created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everybody.” (Eph. 2:14-15 MSG)

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.

December 17 2020 (click for audio)

Jesus Born in Bethlehem

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to receive the promise of God's blessing upon me and my family today, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 115...

*May the Lord richly bless
both you and your children.
May you be blessed by the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
... we can praise the Lord
both now and forever!
Psalm 115:14-15,18.*

Today I continue to reflect on the extraordinary way that Old Testament prophecies made way for the coming of Jesus.

The prophet Micah was a hard-working farmer living at least seven centuries before Christ. Horrified by the injustice of Israel, he predicted that a new ruler would one day arise from a little town called Bethlehem...

*'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.'
Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor bears a son,
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.
He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.
Micah 5:2-4*

Ant Man must surely be the unlikeliest of the Marvel superheroes, and yet the movie garnered more than half a billion dollars in ticket sales worldwide. Everyone loves stories about the little guy overcoming the great. Maybe because we all secretly feel feeble. I love that Micah begins this prophecy by saying, "Though you are small", before going on to promise, "out of you will come... [one whose] greatness will reach to the ends of the earth."

It reminds me of another Old Testament prophet, Zechariah, who said, “Who dares despise the day of small things”?

Ask

In what specific areas do I feel weak, inadequate or exposed today? I invite the Holy Spirit to come to these particular places now, and to turn them into strengths.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who died resisting the Nazis, once asked: “How can God entrust great things to one who will not thankfully receive from him the little things? (Life Together, p. 21) And so I take time now to actually thank God for the ways in which I currently feel small.

Pause and pray

Imagine how the ordinary inhabitants of Bethlehem felt when they heard Micah’s prophecy! Thinking now of one of my friends who maybe feels small and insignificant like Bethlehem, I pray for them to be filled with unexpected hope this Christmas.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I think of its fulfillment in the baby born in a Bethlehem stable, whose greatness has indeed reached the ends of the earth.

*‘But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.’
Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor bears a son,
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.
He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.
Micah 5:2-4.*

700 years after Micah’s prophecy, ‘wise men from the East’ came to Jerusalem wondering where the Messiah would be born and interestingly the religious leaders knew exactly where to direct them because of this prophecy. But when Matthew’s Gospel quotes Micah’s words, he subtly re-frames them. Instead of ‘Though you are small,’ Mathew says, ‘you... are by no means least’ (2:6) Do I hear this subtle shift in the way the Lord addresses me in my own areas of inadequacy? ‘You are by no means like that.’

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I offer you my sense of weakness, of smallness and of inadequacy today. I yield to your plan for my life, accepting that, though I am small, because of Christ who is born in me, I am 'by no means least.'

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, I walk a little taller, remembering that, 'God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.' (1 Cor. 1:27-29a) Hallelujah!

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.

December 18 2020 (click for audio)

Charles Wesley – Hero of Creativity

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. Today therefore we are thanking God for the extraordinary example of Charles Wesley, author of more than 6,000 hymns and therefore a prolific hero of Creativity.

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to celebrate the wonderful way God looks after me today, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 35...

*Let those who desire my vindication
shout for joy and be glad,
and say evermore,
'Great is the Lord,
who delights in the welfare of his servant.'
Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness
and of your praise all day long.
Psalm 35:27-28 (NRSVA)****

** Note: I have used the NRSVA (New Revised Standard Version Anglicized) translation rather than the prescribed NLT as I wished to link the reading to the words of a hymn by Charles Wesley.

Charles Wesley was the 18th of 19 children born to the rather mediocre poet and clergyman, Samuel Wesley, and the absolutely brilliant Susanna Wesley. As a student at Oxford, Charles started what became sneeringly known as the 'Holy Club', because of their disciplined study of the Bible, and prayerful pursuit of God. He was joined by his older brother John, who would later found the Methodist movement, and the future revival evangelist George Whitefield. John Wesley was, of course, a brilliant strategist and theologian, but Charles was a creative genius, writing more than 6,000 hymns, including, "And Can it Be?", "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling", and, "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing!"

In May 1738, Charles was unwell and tormented with doubts about his faith when he heard the Moravian preacher, Peter Böhler read Psalm 35 (which was our rejoicing Psalm for today). Böhler exclaimed, "Had I a thousand tongues, I would praise Him with them all." This was the catalytic moment through which Charles Wesley came to a living faith in Jesus Christ, inspiring him to write one of his very greatest hymns:

*O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise!
The glories of my God and King,*

The triumphs of His grace!

Charles Wesley's contemporary, the politician Andrew Fletcher, said "Let me make the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws." It's easy to minimize the importance of creative gifts, but by writing so many God-glorifying, Christ-centered, and Spirit-saturated hymns, Charles Wesley shaped the culture of his day, and of subsequent generations. His poetry has loosed millions of tongues to sing the Great Redeemer's praise on every continent!

Ask

Is there a creative gift I've been neglecting? I ask myself the question God asked Moses, 'What is that in your hand?' (Exodus 4:2). What ordinary thing do I have in my hand? I offer it to the Lord today.

Pause and pray

I think of someone I know who is particularly skillful in a creative gift. An aspiring actor, painter or film-maker, or, perhaps, an established writer. Has this year been particularly difficult in their industry? I pray encouragement and fresh inspiration for them now.

Pause and pray

Yield

There is one song by Charles Wesley which eclipses all the rest. It has appeared in more than 1,200 hymn books, and has been recorded many hundreds of times by everyone from Trinity College Choir to Michael Bublé. It remains a seasonal sensation:

*Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King:
peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
join the triumph of the skies;*

God, help me to hold the things I make lightly, to release every creative thing I do back into your hands. May the words I speak in the coming day bring life, and, like Charles Wesley's hymns, may they convey your goodness to the world.

*with th'angelic hosts proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King"*

The opening line, written by Charles Wesley, was, "Hark how all the Welkin Rings" and George Whitefield, changed it because even in the 18th Century most people had no idea that Welkin was an old word for Heaven! Meanwhile, the Mendelssohn tune we know so well was one the composer himself thought was entirely unsuitable for church! Great creativity is always collaborative. We need one another. It was Pablo Picasso who said that 'Art is theft'. Meanwhile the great poet T.S. Eliot said that 'Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn.' (The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and criticism, T.S. Eliot 1920) What creativity might I steal today? What creative relationships has God given me?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, help me to hold the things I make lightly, to release every creative thing I do back into your hands. May the words I speak in the coming day bring life, and, like Charles Wesley's hymns, may they convey your goodness to the world.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, I add my voice to the words of the Psalmist,

May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;
establish the work of our hands for us –
yes, establish the work of our hands. (Psalm 90:17).

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.

December 19 2020 (click for audio)

Jesus Son of David

Throughout this week we have been exploring the extraordinary Old Testament prophecies that predicted and prepared for the coming of Christ at Christmas.

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in the way God saves me and ‘holds me safe’, joining in the ancient praise of all God’s people in the words of Psalm 90...

*You hold me safe beyond the reach of my enemies;
you save me from violent opponents.
For this, O Lord, I will praise you among the nations;
I will sing praises to your name.
You give great victories to your king;
you show unfailing love to your anointed,
to David and all his descendants forever.*

Psalm 115:48b-50.

1000 years before Jesus, King David tells the prophet Nathan that he has decided to build a house for God. But Nathan comes back with a very surprising response, a prophecy that turns the tables on David’s generosity, and sets the table for the coming of King Jesus:

“The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: when your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son.”

2 Samuel 7:11b-14a

David’s desire is to build a house for God, but God’s desire is to build a house for David! You simply cannot out-give God. David’s generosity seems to trigger an even greater generosity in the heart of the Father. In the coming week we will all give and receive gifts. But with God it’s a little different: The more I give, the more he gives back to me. The more I worship, the more I am blessed. The more I sacrifice and surrender, the more my hands are open to receive.

Ask

What am I planning to give to the King of Kings this Christmas? Like David in today’s story, I take time now to tell him what’s on my heart to give.

Pause and pray

The immediate outworking of Nathan's prophecy is in the life of King David's own son Solomon 'your own flesh and blood'. I take time now to pray God's blessing this Christmas upon the immediate members of my own family.

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 declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: when your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son."

2 Samuel 7:11b-14a.

The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy takes a thousand years. As we trace the story of God it seems that he only has two speeds: suddenly and slowly. And even when he does things suddenly, he always takes his time!

It was 200 years after this promise to David, when the house of David seemed doomed at the hands of the Assyrians, that the prophet Isaiah picked up Nathan's prophetic baton, reasserting that a Davidic son was coming into the world:

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 9:6

It would be a very long time coming, but Jesus, God's forever king, was on his way!

Yielding Prayer

King Jesus, I can't out give you, but neither can I out wait you. I may give small things to you now but you give vast things to me eternally. Remembering the lesson I was forced to learn as a child, when six days til Christmas seemed forever, I yield my impatience to your faithfulness, and my finite imagination to your eternal plan.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me assures me that I will never be able to out give his generosity:

"Test me in this," he says. "See if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven, and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

Malachi 3:10

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.*

December 20 2020 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Prayer for Advent

As I journey towards the 25th I prepare my heart for Christ's coming using the words of the ancient prayer of the church: '***Maranatha, come Lord Jesus***'.

I repeat these words now:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

Turning my attention now to focus on my own heart, I may become aware of sinful thoughts, words or deeds in my life, and I simply acknowledge them now before You, Lord, and I pray for my own life:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

And now I turn my thoughts to think of someone who needs Christ's love today. I name them before You and pray for them:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

Next, I think about my own local church family and the many activities we have planned in this Christmas season, whether they are in person or online, and I pray, again for us:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

Finally, I think of a place in the world right now that desperately needs Your comfort, and I pray for that place, that situation, those people:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

Way back in the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux, who was the founder of the Cistercian order of monks, said that Christ comes to us in three different ways: firstly, in Bethlehem at Christmas; secondly, at the end of the age; and thirdly, in the lives of believers every single day. So, let's pray for all three of Christ's coming this Advent:

Thank You, Father, for loving us so much that You sent Your Son to save us.

Maranatha. May Jesus be born again amongst us this Christmas.

Thank You, Jesus, that You came before and You are coming again in glory.

Maranatha. We long for You to return and make all things new.

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for filling my life.

Maranatha. May the Lord Jesus Christ be born again in me today.

A Sabbath Blessing

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

May my peace and perspective be renewed in the busyness of this season.

May my hand be free enough from spending and acquiring to receive Your gift.

May a little of the wonder and magic of Christmas awaken the child within me today.

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

December 21 2020 (click for audio)

Here and Now

This week, as we approach the end of Advent and prepare ourselves to celebrate Christmas Day, we will continue to pray O Come Emmanuel, and reflect on some of the Bible's 'songs of advent' - cries of longing and explosions of praise for the miracle that is Christ entering our 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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's faithfulness, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 136...

He remembered us in our weakness.

His faithful love endures forever.

He saved us from our enemies.

His faithful love endures forever.

Psalm 136:23-24

Pause and pray

The first song I'm reflecting on this week was written centuries before Christ. The chapters which come before today's reading retell the story of God's great works in Israel's past.

However, the writer isn't content with merely reciting history. Instead, they cry out for God to move in their day; for a Messiah to come...

Lord, save us!

Lord, grant us success!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

From the house of the Lord we bless you.

The Lord is God,

and he has made his light shine on us.

With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will praise you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures for ever.

Psalm 118:25-29

'Lord save us!' It's easy to view Christmas in the past tense, to look upon Christ's entering of our world as history. The same can go for Jesus' work in my own life. I have been saved, after all.

Today, like the Psalmist, I acknowledge that my story is not over. I am saved but there is so much that I still need saving from.

Ask

What do I need Christ to come and save me from today?
Are there situations of injustice I'm facing?
Are there worries or anxieties weighing on me?
Is there an area of sin that I need to confess and experience freedom in?
Lord Jesus, save me.
In the situations I face that are beyond my control - save me.
In those that are within my control but where I struggle - save me.
Savior, save me.

Pause and pray

Who do I know who struggles to believe that God can save them? Maybe because of hurt, disappointment or just the toll of life, they doubt that God will move in their situation here and now?

Lord, I hold them before You. Show them Your love, attention and care.

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.

Lord, save us!
Lord, grant us success!
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
From the house of the Lord we bless you.
The Lord is God,
and he has made his light shine on us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.
You are my God, and I will praise you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.
Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures for ever.
Psalm 118:25-29

The outpouring of praise the author expresses - so soon after crying for help - challenges me deeply. As I prepare to celebrate Christmas in the difficult climate of the Covid-19 pandemic, can I be honest about what I'm grieving this year, whilst also expressing gratitude for the gift of Jesus and the things God has done for me?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord Jesus, as I prepare to celebrate your first coming this Christmas, I consciously call to mind the times in my history where You have saved me. Thank you Lord. I celebrate and yield to Your faithfulness today.

Yielding Promise

Today, I hold onto your promise that whatever I'm facing, you are working all things together for my good (Romans 8:28).

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.

December 22 2020 (click for audio)

Mary's Trust

This week, as we prepare ourselves to celebrate Christmas Day, we are reflecting on some of the Bible's 'songs of advent' - cries of longing and explosions of praise for the miracle that is Christ entering our world.

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. '**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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's glory today, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 113...

*For the Lord is high above the nations;
his glory is higher than the heavens.
Who can be compared with the Lord our God,
who is enthroned on high?
He stoops to look down
on heaven and on earth.
Psalm 113:4-6*

Pause and pray

Today's song of Advent is the most famous of all - the spontaneous hymn of praise that bursts out of the heart of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Having been visited by the Angel Gabriel and told that God highly favors her, the Holy Spirit has come upon this young woman. Now the long-promised Messiah, God's Son, is coming into the world, miraculously growing in the womb of an unmarried teenager...

*And Mary said:
"My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation."
Luke 1:46-50*

Mary expresses immense joy that she is being trusted to carry and raise God's Son! Theologian Lucy Peppiatt reminds me that:

'Mary is not simply a receptacle of the divine, housing him as it were. She supplies his humanity from her own body. Her blood forms him, her food nourishes him, her breasts feed him... Jesus is made *of* her, not just *in* her.*

*Lucy Peppiatt, *Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women* (Inter Varsity Press, 2019) p30

While Mary's experience is utterly unique, I am reminded today that I too share something of that privilege. God's Son dwells within me, by the Holy Spirit, and trusts me to use the elements of my life - my body, my gifts, my relationships, my unique point of view - to carry His presence into the world.

What an honor that God trusts me like this.

Ask

Father, my spirit rejoices in the staggering truth that You trust me to carry the presence of Your Son into the world.

As I pause now, I invite Your Holy Spirit to fill me afresh. Wake me up to the awesome reality that Jesus Christ resides within me by Your Spirit. Take every part of my life and use it to glorify Your Son.

Pause and pray

Mary rejoices because she knows how highly God thinks of her.

God, I name before You now those I know who don't know Jesus or the love He has for them.

I also name before You those who do know You but - for whatever reason - struggle to both accept and receive Your love the way Mary Did

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.

And Mary said:

*"My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation."*

Luke 1:46-50

Mary's life plans have just been turned upside down. As an unwed mother, she faced a potential scandal of enormous proportions. Yet she believes that God is doing great things for her. Praise is exploding out of her because she is assured of her importance to God.

What is my reaction when my ambitions are thwarted? When my carefully curated plans come undone? Honestly, I'm more likely to express disappointment and panic than praise.

Mary's song challenges me to remember that my importance to God is not measured by how successful my life appears to others or me.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I yield to Your plans for my life, to Your disruptions to my ambitions. Teach me to let go of my ideas of how my life should look and instead trust in Your profound love for me.

Yielding Promise

Today, I hold onto your promise in Psalm 62. You are my rock and salvation; with you I shall not be shaken.
(Psalm 62:2)

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.

December 23 2020 (click for audio)

Messiah Revealed

This week, we're preparing to celebrate Christmas day, by reflecting on the Bible's 'songs of Advent' – praise for the miracle of Christ entering our 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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's justice today, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 113...

He lifts the poor from the dust
and the needy from the garbage dump.
He sets them among princes,
even the princes of his own people!

Psalm 113:7-8

Pause and pray

Today I continue to reflect on the song of Mary as she grapples with the implications of the miracle that is growing inside her.

In the first half of her song, Mary praised God for His love towards her. Now she turns her gaze outwards to what her Son's birth will mean for the world...

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.

Luke 1:51-55

It's striking that, in exploring what God will do by bringing Jesus into the world, Mary focuses on what God has already done.

The wounds of Israel's history led many in Mary's day to conclude that the Messiah would be a fearsome warrior who'd wipe out their oppressors.

Mary however seems to read the past very differently. Captivated by God's historic mercies, she understands what the Messiah's ways will be like - the hungry will be fed, the humble lifted up, pride and power will be toppled...

Ask

I acknowledge that I often let my own cultural and personal baggage distort my image of God. I long for the clarity with which Mary understands Jesus' character.

Lord Jesus, I want to encounter you as you really are. Where are my blind spots? Show me where I carry false ideas about what You are like.

Pause and pray

Lord Jesus, the poor and the hungry are always uppermost in your concern. I hold before You now those I know who quite simply do not have enough. Those who have lost their jobs or are facing huge financial pressure this Christmas. Even those who aren't sure how they'll feed their family. Grant them immediate help but also bring long term change and justice to their situations.

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 has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.
Luke 1:51-55

'He scatters those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.'

That phrase cuts me deep. This Messiah is not content to be King merely over the externals of my life. He wants to rule the inner world of my soul, including all the ugly traits I try so hard to hide.

Where does my heart harbor pride? Who, if I'm totally honest, do I look down on? Politically, spiritually, morally... Who do I think that I am better than?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I confess my pride. Purge me of superiority. Shake from me the idea that I am any more or any less in need of Your great mercy than anyone else. King Jesus, I invite You to reign over my inner life once more.

Yielding Promise

God, today I am thankful for Your promise in Romans that because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, I am not condemned but set free. (Romans 8:1-2).

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.

December 24 2020 (click for audio)

Encouragement and Silence

As we approach the end of Advent, we are reflecting on some of the Bible's 'songs of Advent' - cries of longing and explosions of praise for the miracle that is Christ entering our 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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

The Lord is merciful and compassionate,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.
The Lord is good to everyone.
He showers compassion on all his creation.
Psalm 145:8-9

Pause and pray

Today I'm reflecting on the first half of the song of Zechariah. An encounter with the Angel Gabriel brought him astonishing news - that though childless and elderly, he and his wife would conceive a baby, John, who'd later prepare Israel for the ministry of Jesus. But Zechariah doubted this was possible and so was struck dumb for nine months until the boy was born.

Now, surrounded by well-wishers who've gathered to celebrate the miracle birth, Zechariah's power of speech suddenly returns....

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us –
to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
Luke 1:68-75

Many all over the world have now lived through nine hard months of lockdown and social distancing. I can relate to how lonely Zechariah's nine months of enforced silence and isolation must have been. Yet, as he utters his first words, he isn't concerned about himself or his situation.

Zechariah now knows first-hand that God keeps His covenants. As his speech returns, his concern is encouraging those gathered that God remains faithful to them - that the Messiah is almost here.

Ask

Lord God, use these strange, disrupted, days to teach me the lesson you taught Zechariah - that You always keep your promises. Remind me of the promises that You have made in my life.

Are there words of encouragement, prophecy or promises from the Bible that I have forgotten or put down? Remind me of them today.

Pause and pray

Have my months of reduced contact made me more concerned about other people or less?

Lord, would You call to mind someone I know where 2020 has been particularly isolating or challenging for them? Clearly demonstrate to them your love and your faithfulness this Christmas. How can I use my interactions today - virtual or in person - to kindle Your hope in their life?

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.

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us –
to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

Luke 1:68-75

I've often wondered why God silenced Zechariah. Was it simply punishment for his disbelief? I'm not so sure.

Zechariah is a man burned by life. Childless in a culture that judged harshly those without children, maybe a face-to-face meeting with an angel genuinely wasn't enough to assure him of God's promise. After all, that could be written off as a dream, or an old man's fantasy.

I think God showed Zechariah extraordinary kindness with his enforced silence. It kept him rooted in the promise given and gave him continual physical proof until it came to pass. Afterwards, I notice that Zechariah

talks about God's future redemption in the present tense. His reality has shifted to one where God's promises are alive and unshakable right now.

What inconveniences in my life, what frustrations and setbacks, might actually be signs of God's kindness to me?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I thank you that even in events and circumstances that I would not choose for myself You can teach me about Your kindness and your faithfulness. I yield to Your sovereignty and choose to trust You.

Yielding Promise

I am thankful for the promise You have reminded me of in today's Psalm – that You are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in love (Psalm 145:8-9).

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.

December 25 2020 (click for audio)

The Angels' Song

This week, we have been reflecting on some of the Bible's 'songs of Advent' - cries of longing and explosions of praise for the miracle that is Christ entering our world. As we celebrate together now, I pray that your day is full of the joy, wonder and peace that Jesus' birth means.

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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly celebrating the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's Good News today, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 98...

Sing a new song to the Lord,
for he has done wonderful deeds.
His right hand has won a mighty victory;
his holy arm has shown his saving power!
The Lord has announced his victory
and has revealed his righteousness to every nation!
Psalm 98: 1-2

Pause and pray

Today the Christmas story reaches its climax. God Almighty enters the world as a little baby boy.

Yet most people in Bethlehem are completely unaware of the miracle taking place in their midst. In the surrounding countryside a group of shepherds, busy looking after their sheep, are about to have their evening's work spectacularly interrupted...

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,
'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.'
When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'
Luke 2:9-15

The first proclamation on Christmas Day is 'Do not be afraid'.

If I'm honest, I'm often fearful of letting God speak into my life. I worry that if I really stop and listen then God will ask too much of me. Rules will be added, bigger sacrifices demanded, more will be added to my already over-crowded plate.

Today I listen again to the angels' words. God's message to me is peace.

Ask

Lord, however this Christmas Day looks, I take this moment to simply be still and listen for Your good, kind and peaceful words to me. In ways quiet or loud, spectacular or subtle, speak to me today Lord.

Pause and pray

Lord, who do I know whose Christmas day is overshadowed by worry; for whom the command 'Do not be afraid' is a battle to obey?

God, I pray for them now. May they hear the words of the angels and know the joy of the shepherds 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.

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'

Luke 2:9-15

The shepherds were at work. They had jobs to do. Angelic visitation or not, there would be consequences for leaving their posts.

How do I handle disruption and interruption? I'm aware that 2020 has not been the year I wanted or planned. I know that this Christmas will be painful and disappointing for many, perhaps even for me.

Yet God is still speaking. He is present and active in times of disruption. Can I lay aside my ideas of how I wish things were, so I can go and find the life of the incarnate Christ today?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for breaking into our world that first Christmas. I give You permission to break into my day however You will. May I know the joy of discovering You afresh this Christmas Day.

Yielding Promise

Today, I give You thanks and Praise for this constant truth:

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.’ John 3:16-17

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.

December 26 2020 (click for audio)

What Is My Calling?

This is our final day reflecting on some of the Bible's 'songs of Advent' - cries of longing and explosions of praise for the miracle that is Christ entering our 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

Lord, in this busy season please help me to be still. I am opening my ears now to hear You, quietly giving thanks for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's love for humanity today, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 8.

When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—
the moon and the stars you set in place—
what are mere mortals that you should think about them,
human beings that you should care for them?
Yet you made them only a little lower than God
and crowned them with glory and honor.

Psalm 8:3-5

Pause and pray

Today I return to the song sung by Zechariah the Priest at the dedication of his infant son John. This boy, later known as John the Baptist, had an immense calling; to prepare the nation of Israel for the ministry of Jesus...

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.

Luke 1:76-79

John had a clear call on his life. What is my calling?

I can expend so much energy wondering where it is exactly that God has called me to live and work and about what exactly I should be doing with my life that it can lead to paralysis - I do nothing for fear of getting it wrong.

I am reminded today that every single Christian shares part of John's calling. Very simply and very profoundly, I am called to help my neighbors both practically, and in understanding and receiving Jesus.

Ask

Do I over complicate things? Where am I too preoccupied with my own significance and calling?

Lord Jesus, remind me today to make John's calling my own; to help those around me welcome You as their Savior.

Pause and pray

Lord, who can I share Your love with today? Who do I know that needs to hear of Your salvation, Your forgiveness and Your mercy? I ask for the opportunity to tell them of Your Love.

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.

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.

Luke 1:76-79

These words aren't just the well-meaning hopes of a father for his son. The Bible says that Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit when he prayed them over John. I wonder whether they anchored and sustained John in the hard times he'd later face. These words are spoken to me too. They promise that in experiencing God's forgiveness and mercy, I will live my life not in fear, but in peace - even when I live in the shadow of death.

Have I let the circumstances of my life displace that peace?

Pause and pray**Yielding Prayer**

Lord, thank You that while troubles and pain will come, your tender mercies sustain me through them giving me life and peace. In uncertainty and instability, I choose today to re-anchor my life in Your goodness, Your faithfulness and Your mercy towards me.

Yielding Promise

Thank You Lord, for Your promise in Psalm 55 that when I cast my cares on You, that You will sustain me. (Psalm 55:22)

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.

December 27 2020 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Prayer for Advent

As we enter this day of rest, we continue to celebrate the incarnation and invite Jesus' presence by the Holy Spirit into today. Together we return again to an ancient prayer of the church: 'Maranatha, come Lord Jesus'.

I repeat these words now:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Turning my attention now to focus on my own heart, I may become aware of sinful thoughts, words or deeds in my life, and I simply acknowledge them now before You, Lord, and I pray for my own life:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

And now I turn my thoughts to think of someone who needs Christ's love today. I name them before You and pray for them:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Next, I think about my own local church family and the many activities we have planned as we approach the New Year, whether they are in person or online, and I pray, again for us:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

Finally, I think of a place in the world right now that desperately needs Your comfort, and I pray for that place, that situation, those people:

Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Pause and pray

Way back in the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux, who was the founder of the Cistercian order of monks, said that Christ comes to us in three different ways: firstly, in Bethlehem at Christmas; secondly, at the end of the age; and thirdly, in the lives of believers every single day. So, let's pray for all three of Christ's comings today:

Thank You, Father, for loving us so much that You sent Your Son to save us.

Maranatha. May Jesus be born again amongst us.

Thank You, Jesus, that You came before and You are coming again in glory.

Maranatha. We long for You to return and make all things new.

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for filling my life.

Maranatha. May the Lord Jesus Christ be born again in me today.

A Sabbath Blessing

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

May my peace and perspective be renewed in the busyness of this season.

May my hand be free enough from spending and acquiring to receive Your gift.

May a little of the wonder and magic of Christmas awaken the child within me today.

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

December 28 2020 (click for audio)

Replay: Rejoice

Week by week we cycle 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 we will be focusing on prayer as we look back at 2020 and then look ahead into 2021.

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

Lord, in this busy season, please help me to be still. I am opening my ears to hear you now, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of a new year.

Rejoice and Reflect

I rejoice in God's incomparable goodness today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 36...

Your unfailing love, O Lord, is as vast as the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your justice like the ocean depths.
You care for people and animals alike, O Lord.
How precious is your unfailing love, O God!
For you are the fountain of life, the light by which we see.
Psalm 36:5-6,9

Over the next three days, rather than following the usual Lectio 365 structure, I'm going to draw on an ancient form of prayer called the Examen to help me reflect on my journey through 2020 and identify some of the ways in which God has accompanied me through this year.

The Examen begins with remembering, which is in itself an important spiritual discipline. Today, I am going to replay the last twelve months, remembering particular moments, and take time to rejoice in God's goodness wherever I recognize it.

And so, once again, I take a moment to be still in God's presence and prepare myself to reflect on 2020. I become aware of my thoughts - especially the things that are distracting and disturbing me. Lord, I offer you my thinking, and I ask you to give me peace.

Pause and pray

I notice my emotions - especially the feelings that are affecting my mood.
Lord, I offer you all that I am feeling right now, and I ask you to give me joy.

Pause and pray

I notice my body - especially the places where I can feel tension and stress.

Lord, I breathe slowly and deeply once again. I set myself at rest in your presence, and I ask you to make me whole.

Pause and pray

Holy Spirit, I welcome you. Guide me as I remember 2020.

When I think about the past year - the devastation of the coronavirus pandemic around the world, the political and social upheaval, the mental health crisis, the urgent environmental challenges, and so on - gratitude might not be my instinctive response, but it's where I choose to begin.

Ask

I take a few moments now to replay the last twelve months in my mind, and to recall some specific events. What were the highlights and encouragements? What did I achieve? When did I experience joy and wonder? I talk with God about these now, to rejoice and give thanks to God.

Pause and pray

As I continue to replay the last twelve months in my mind, who were the people who encouraged me? Who was there when I needed help? Whose words or actions inspired me to become a better me this year? I take a few moments to give thanks to God for these people. (Maybe there's some way that I could express my thanks to them today?)

Pause and pray

Yield

As I prepare to leave 2020 in a few days time, what do I want to take with me? What good things have I gained? What have I learned? What holy habits have I begun to develop this year that I want to take into the coming year? I talk with God about these now.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer & Promise

Returning to Psalm 36, I yield to its promises and I make it my prayer today.

Your unfailing love, O Lord, is as vast as the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your justice like the ocean depths.
You care for people and animals alike, O Lord.
How precious is your unfailing love, O God!
For you are the fountain of life, the light by which [I] see. (Psalm 36:5-6,9)

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.

December 29 2020 (click for audio)

Replay: Lament and Repent

This week we are focusing on prayer as we look back at 2020 and then look ahead into 2021

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

Lord, as this year draws to an end, please help me to be still. I am opening my ears to hear you now, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of a new year.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's compassion and forgiveness today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 103...

For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

Psalm 103:11-14

Rather than following our usual Lectio 365 structure, I'm going to continue to draw on an ancient form of prayer called the Examen to help me reflect on my journey through 2020 and identify some of the ways in which God has accompanied me through this year.

The Examen begins with remembering, which is in itself an important spiritual discipline. Today, I am going to replay the last twelve months, remembering particular moments, and take time to lament what has been difficult, and repent where I have sinned and fallen short of God's best.

And so, once again, I pause to be still in God's presence and I prepare myself to reflect on 2020. I become aware of my thoughts - especially the things that are distracting and disturbing me. Lord, I offer you my thinking, and I ask you to give me peace.

Pause and pray

I notice my emotions - especially the feelings that are affecting my mood.

Lord, I offer you all that I am feeling right now, and I ask you to give me joy.

Pause and pray

I notice my body - especially the places where I can feel tension and stress.

Lord, I breathe slowly and deeply once again. I set myself at rest in your presence, and I ask you to make me whole.

Pause and pray

Holy Spirit, I welcome you. Guide me as I remember 2020.

Ask

I take a few moments now to replay the last twelve months in my mind, and to recall some specific events. How has the coronavirus pandemic, and the political and social upheaval around the world affected me? What have I found particularly difficult, or even painful this year? I allow myself to lament, and I ask God to meet me in my desolation.

Pause and pray

Where did I get things wrong this year? In what ways have I sinned and fallen short of God's best for me? I take a few moments to talk with God about these things now. I repent and I ask for forgiveness.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I listen to the following words from Hebrews chapter 12, I think about what I want to leave behind as I step into the new year in a couple of days time.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV)

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Heavenly Father, I ask you to help me throw off the things that hinder me and hold me back. The way I compare myself with others. My reluctance to ask for help when I need it. The hurt I'm holding inside. I want to be free of these things in 2021. And I ask for your forgiveness too as I consciously turn away from the sin that has so easily entangled me. Help me to fix my eyes firmly on Jesus and run the race marked out for me.

Yielding Promise

I am grateful for the extraordinary promises in today's Psalm; 'For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for [me]; as far as the east is from the west,

So far has he removed [my] transgressions from [me].' (Psalm 103:11-12) Thank you God.

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.

December 30 2020 (click for audio)

Reboot and Resolve

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

Lord, as this year draws to an end, please help me to be still. I am opening my ears to hear you now, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of a new year.

Rejoice and Reflect

I rejoice in God's guidance today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 25...

Show me the right path, O Lord;
point out the road for me to follow.
Lead me by your truth and teach me,
for you are the God who saves me.
All day long I put my hope in you.
Remember, O Lord, your compassion and unfailing love,
which you have shown from long ages past.
Psalm 25:4-6

For the final time this week, rather than following our usual Lectio 365 structure, I'm going to draw on an ancient form of prayer called the Examen to reflect on my journey through 2020.

Over the last couple of days, I have replayed the last twelve months; I have rejoiced in God's goodness, lamented some of what has been dark and difficult, and repented of the ways in which I have fallen short in 2020. I have acknowledged the good times and the less-good times, and I have become aware of God's presence in, over and through it all. And now, as I look towards the beginning of 2021, I am ready to reboot, to prepare myself for a fresh start on the 1st January.

And so, once again, I pause to be still in God's presence.

I become aware of my thoughts - especially the things that are distracting and disturbing me.

Lord, I offer you my thinking, and I ask you to give me peace.

Pause and pray

I notice my emotions - especially the feelings that are affecting my mood.

Lord, I offer you all that I am feeling right now, and I ask you to give me joy.

Pause and pray

I notice my body - especially the places where I can feel tension and stress.

Lord, I breathe slowly and deeply once again. I set myself at rest in your presence, and I ask you to make me whole.

Pause and pray

How do I feel about 2021? What am I looking forward to? What am I hoping for? Am I anxious about anything? I take a few moments to talk with God about how I'm feeling.....?

Pause and pray**Ask**

Lord, what are You asking of me this year? How do You want me to be different? Is there some new spiritual discipline or practice that You're inviting me to develop?

Pause and pray

Lord, I ask You to give me a verse from the Bible or a word or a story for 2021. 'Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening.' (1 Samuel 3:10).

Pause and pray**Yield**

As I read Paul's encouragement to the church in Philippi, I open my ears to hear what God might want to say to me about the year ahead.

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:13-14 (NIV UK)

What goal or prize is God inviting me to 'press on' towards this coming year?

Pause and pray**Yielding Prayer**

Jesus, I lay everything about the coming year before You. I fix my eyes on You and You alone. You are both the author and the perfecter of faith - I yield to the story that You are writing in and through my life.

Yielding Promise

I am grateful for the assurance in the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome that, 'in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.' (Romans 8:28, NIV) Even when I don't perceive it, God is at work in my life.

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.

December 31 2020 (click for audio)

The Three Loves

Today is Thursday the 31st of December, and today, at the end of this year, we are briefly reflecting on the 'three great loves' at the heart of Christian discipleship, asking; how can we love God, love others, and love the world more in the year to come.

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

Lord, as this year draws to an end, please help me to be still. I am opening my ears to hear you now, quietly preparing my heart for the wonder of a new year.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's glory today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 19...

The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
The skies display his craftsmanship.
Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.
They speak without a sound or word;
their voice is never heard.
Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
and their words to all the world.

Psalm 19:1-4

Today I begin by reflecting on a dramatic conversation, in Matthew's gospel, where Jesus gets right to the heart and soul of what it means to follow Him.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment.

Matthew 22:34-38

Sometimes, Christianity can seem cluttered, complicated and confusing - but Jesus makes it beautifully simple. First and foremost, he says, it is about loving God with absolutely everything I've got.

Ask

Isn't it interesting that Jesus frames loving God as an activity of the mind as well as the heart?

Lord, help me to love You with all my mind this year. Teach me to study. Stretch my thinking. Help me to turn my thoughts towards You, and fix my mind upon You today.

Pause and pray

I think of those - perhaps even people I know - whose thoughts are troubled and anxious now, whether because of difficult circumstances or because of poor mental health. Lord, I ask You to draw near to them, even though they may be finding it hard to draw near to 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.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment.

Matthew 22:34-38 (NIV UK)

Jesus refuses to give the Pharisees another set of rules and regulations in response to their question. Instead, he defines faith as a passionate, all-consuming relationship.

I'm uncomfortably aware that faith doesn't always feel like that for me. I often get distracted, and there are even times when my heart becomes hardened.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord God, I have lots of hopes and aspirations for the coming year, but I'm choosing to make just one 'New Year's Resolution' above all the others, and it's simply this... I resolve to love You with all my heart, and all my soul, and all my mind this year. I surrender all that I have and all that I am to You at the start of this new year.

Yielding Promise

I am grateful for the assurance in the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome that nothing can separate me from the passionate, all-consuming love of God in Christ... neither the present nor the future, whatever it may hold. (Romans 8:28)

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.