

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

October 2020

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Audio for Each Day in MP3 Format

[Month of October 2020](#)

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October 01 2020 (click for audio)

Hearing and Listening

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's blessing and abundance, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 16 ...

*I will bless the Lord who guides me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
I know the Lord is always with me.
I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.*

Psalm 16:7-8

Pause and pray

Today, I am continuing to reflect on Samuel's time in the temple. He has been serving and learning with Eli the priest for a number of years, and was probably about twelve when he first heard the voice of the Lord for himself...

The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, 'Here I am.' And he ran to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me' But Eli said, 'I did not call; go back and lie down.' So he went and lay down. Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.' 'My son,' Eli said, 'I did not call; go back and lie down.'

1 Samuel 3:1-6

Hearing and listening are two different things.

My middle daughter was profoundly deaf when she was born. When she was only 2 years old, surgeons fitted her first cochlear implant during a successful four-and-a-half hour operation. However, our delight gradually gave way to disappointment as the months passed without her showing any signs of speaking. And then we met a therapist who gave us hope again. 'Your daughter can hear,' she said, 'We just need to teach her how to listen. When she learns how to listen, she will understand what she is hearing.'

Samuel didn't understand that what he was hearing was the voice of God. He needed Eli to teach him how to listen.

I hear a lot of noise, every single day. Amongst the noise, I also hear the voice of God, but I don't always recognize it or understand it. Learning begins with listening. I need to learn how to listen carefully.

Ask

I sit quietly for a few moments and listen. What can I hear? Are there noises outside? Can I hear my own breathing? Are there noises inside too? What thoughts are tumbling around my head right now?

God, I ask You to help me to listen carefully today. And in doing so, help me to hear You.

Pause and pray

Who do I know that really needs to hear from God at the moment? *God, I ask You to speak to them. Speak in a way that they will hear You. Is there something that You want me to say or send to them 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 boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, 'Here I am.' And he ran to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me' But Eli said, 'I did not call; go back and lie down.' So he went and lay down. Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.' 'My son,' Eli said, 'I did not call; go back and lie down.'

1 Samuel 3:1-6

The writer of this part of Samuel's story says that the 'word of the Lord was rare' and that 'there were not many visions.' At that time, the Spirit of God only came upon certain people in certain circumstances.

600 years later, however, in a small room above a marketplace in Jerusalem, all of that changed, forever. The Spirit of God was poured out on a crowd of Jesus' followers, and the word of the Lord has passed from one to another ever since, with many seeing visions.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

I yield to You, Holy Spirit. Teach me. Guide me today. Show me the way. I'm listening for Your word. Open my eyes and my mind to see visions, and to dream dreams.

Yielding Promise

Thank you Jesus, for your promise that the ‘Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things...’ (John 14:26)

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.

October 2 2020 (click for audio)
The Master's Voice

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's love and power, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 17...

*I am praying to you because I know you will answer, O God.
Bend down and listen as I pray.
Show me your unfailing love in wonderful ways.
By your mighty power you rescue
those who seek refuge from their enemies.*

Psalm 17:6-7

Pause and pray

Today I am continuing to reflect on the night that Samuel heard the voice of God for the first time, even though it took him a while to realize that's what it was...

Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. A third time the Lord called, 'Samuel!' And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.' Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, 'Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.' So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' Then Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

1 Samuel 3:7-10

Francis Barraud was a painter in the 1890s. When his brother Mark died, Francis inherited a terrier dog, Nipper, and an old wind-up gramophone player along with some recordings of Mark's voice. When Francis played these recordings, Nipper would sit for hours staring into the gramophone funnel, listening intently.

Francis eventually decided to paint this touching scene, and he called the piece, 'His Master's Voice'. At the time, he had no idea that this image would eventually become the logo for a Gramophone Company. When they opened their first store in 1921, this British company decided not to use their own name, but instead, to use the title of Francis painting - 'His Master's Voice', or as it is more commonly known, HMV.

In the temple, Samuel learned to recognize *his master's voice*, the voice of God. And he learned about God, and from God, because he spent time listening.

Ask

As I think about my day, where and when could I make space to listen for the voice of God? I echo Samuel's prayer today, *Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.*

Pause and pray

The writer says that at that time, 'Samuel did not yet know the Lord. The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.'

Who do I know that doesn't yet know the Lord? *Father, I ask you to speak your word to them, and reveal yourself to them.*

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. A third time the Lord called, 'Samuel!' And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.' Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, 'Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.' So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' Then Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

1 Samuel 3:7-10

I wonder how Samuel felt when he realized that it wasn't Eli, but the Lord speaking his name... 'Samuel! Samuel!'

In these few moments of stillness, I imagine God speaking *my* name...

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Father God, help me to recognize when You are calling my name. Help me to recognize Your voice. Speak Lord, your servant is listening.

Yielding Promise

Thank you, Lord, for your promise in Psalm 91: 'Because he loves me,' says the Lord, 'I will rescue him;

I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.' - (Psalm 91:14-15)

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.*

October 03 2020 (click for audio)

Prayer to Power

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's glory and protection, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 18...

*I love you, Lord;
you are my strength.
The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my savior;
my God is my rock, in whom I find protection.
He is my shield, the power that saves me,
and my place of safety.
Psalm 18:1-2*

Pause and pray

Today I am continuing to reflect on Samuel as he serves and learns from Eli the priest. One night, the Lord tells Samuel that He is going to judge Eli and his family because Eli's sons have been wicked, and Samuel doesn't know what to do next...

Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, but Eli called him and said, 'Samuel, my son.' Samuel answered, 'Here I am.' 'What was it he said to you?' Eli asked. 'Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.' So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, 'He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.' The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground.

1 Samuel 3:15-19

The writer says that Samuel felt afraid to tell Eli the priest about his vision. Maybe Samuel was worried that Eli might get angry or upset?

I don't find it easy to always speak the truth to my family and my friends. On those rare occasions when I feel the need to ask a difficult question, or maybe challenge something that someone has done or said that wasn't good, it takes a lot of courage for me to speak up. And yet, the Apostle Paul repeatedly urges believers to speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15) 'Admonish one another,' he writes to the Colossian church (Colossians 3:16). Advise one another, warn

one another, reprimand one another. And then, 'respect those who *admonish you*', he writes to the church in Thessaloniki (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

Ask

Am I avoiding asking someone I know a difficult question, maybe because I don't know how they'll react, or because I don't want to upset them (or get upset myself)?

Lord, I ask You to help me to speak the truth in love.

Pause and pray

Eli the priest was a leader in the temple, a man with authority and power. Sometimes it is particularly hard to speak truth to people who have power.

I ask You God to raise up unlikely prophets, like the boy Samuel, to speak truth into the places of power in my nation... into the executive boards of large organizations, into the committees of local and national governments, and to church leadership too. May Your word be heard.

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.

Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, but Eli called him and said, 'Samuel, my son.' Samuel answered, 'Here I am.' 'What was it he said to you?' Eli asked. 'Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.' So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, 'He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.' The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground.

1 Samuel 3:15-19

As a child, in the temple, Samuel learned not only to listen for the voice of God, but to act on what God said - he didn't let God's words 'fall to the ground'.

What has God said to me? What scriptures or pictures has God given to me? What have I done with them? Have I held onto them, checked them out with trusted friends, acted on them in faith... or have I let them 'fall to the ground'?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I'm sorry for the times when I haven't taken You as seriously as you take me. I'm sorry for anything that You've given or said to me that I've let fall to the ground. If I've missed something important, I'd be grateful if You could remind me. I'll try to listen more carefully this time, and I'll try to do something about it too.

Yielding Promise

Jesus, thank You for Your promise in the book of Ephesians that when we speak the truth in love to one another, we are able to grow together to be more like 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.

October 04 2020 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Blessing

I've been thinking this week about the biblical priority of learning. And so, as I settle into this time of prayer now, I ask God to renew in me a tender, teachable heart.

Pause and pray

*I have hidden your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you...
Open my eyes that I may see
wonderful things in your law.
I am a stranger on earth;
Do not hide your commands from me.
My soul is consumed with longing
For your laws at all times...
Your statutes are my delight;
they are my counselors.*

Psalm 119:11,18–20,24 (NIV)

Pause and pray

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

* Wayne Muller, *Sabbath*, p1

*

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

Pause and pray

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

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

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

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

Pause and pray

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

Pause and pray

Sabbath Blessing

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

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

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

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

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

**Pete Greig, Sabbath Blessing, petegreig.info

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

God Makes Space

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

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 welcome, You invite me into Your family. I sit at Your table and savor Your word to me. Help me receive all the nourishment You have for me today.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*For the word of the Lord holds true,
and we can trust everything he does.
He loves whatever is just and good;
the unfailing love of the Lord fills the earth.*

Psalm 33:4-5

Pause and pray

At the very beginning of the creation story, I see a beautiful picture of God as host and Adam and Eve as guests in God's garden. Over the next few days, I will reflect on this story of the very first act of hospitality...

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Genesis 2:8-9, 15

God the gardener and God the host. He makes a space for Adam, plants him smack dab in the middle of this oasis. It is a beautiful space, with trees that are pleasing to the eye. It is also a functional space, with trees that are good for food. God demonstrates hospitality that is concerned with both form and function, beauty and utility.

Ask

I take a few moments and reflect on all the ways God has surrounded me with beauty. When I look around me, what do I see? I also reflect on all the ways that God has taken care of my needs. In the quiet, I offer up thanksgiving for His loving and careful attention to me.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for the artists, the photographers, the gardeners, the musicians, chefs, designers, architects and playwrights, for those who create and cultivate beauty. Give them eyes to see the beauty You have created on the earth. May they be bold messengers - carrying beauty through their craft. May they curate spaces of flourishing for us all. In the quiet, I pray for them by name.

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.

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Genesis 2:8-9, 15

God creates space, places both man and woman in it, and then charges them with a task. Work the garden. Take care of it. Be a co-creator. In this passage I see that God does not invite us to passively receive His hospitality, but to also actively cultivate space together with Him.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I choose not only to bloom where You have planted me, but also to cultivate that place. Thank You for the invitation to co-create with You - to create spaces where others can grow and flourish.

Yielding Promise

Thank You, Lord, for Your promise in Ephesians: 'For we are [Your] handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which [You] prepared in advance for us to do.'(Eph 2:10)

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.

October 06 2020 (click for audio)

Community & Vulnerability

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 hospitality. ‘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

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's creativity and power, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 33...

*Let the whole world fear the Lord,
and let everyone stand in awe of him.
For when he spoke, the world began!
It appeared at his command.*

Psalm 33:8-9

Pause and pray

God the Host creates a beautiful and functional space for Adam - the garden of Eden - but He declares that it is not good for Adam to be alone there. Today I reflect on His solution...

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man... Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Genesis 2:21-22,25

We are created both for community and for vulnerability. God creates Eve out of Adam, and in the garden, in the place of God's making, they are naked and unashamed. Vulnerability is as natural as breathing. It's a shame free zone.

Ask

Is my home a shame free zone? How ‘naked’ and ‘unashamed’ am I in my close relationships? God, in the quiet would You show me how I can be more like You as I practice hospitality.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for those who feel like they are on their own. The wealthy. Widows and widowers. Addicts and those struggling with their mental health. Would You put the lonely in families? Would You help them take risks and open up their lives to someone new?

God, in the quiet I ask You to bring someone who is lonely to mind. Help me pray for them, and show me how I might alleviate their loneliness.

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.

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man... Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Genesis 2:21-22,25

Emotional safety is vital to healthy hospitality. God creates a space where Adam and Eve are vulnerable but safe. I wonder in how many of my spaces do I have to wear invisible soul armor, just to survive? Or hide behind a false persona, only revealing what I think is expected, or what social dictates prescribe?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, You are a safe space. Show me how to be vulnerable before You, to offer all of myself to You fully and freely without reserve. As a recipient of Your welcome and Your safety, help me extend the same to others. Help to create safe spaces where people can show up just as they are.

Yielding Promise

Today, God, I trust in Your promise of love instead of shame: 'And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.' (Rom 5:5)

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.

October 07 2020 (click for audio)

Boundary Lines in Pleasant Places

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 welcome, You invite me into Your family. I sit at Your table and savor Your word to me. Help me receive all the nourishment You have for me today.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*I will praise the Lord at all times.
I will constantly speak his praises.
I will boast only in the Lord;
let all who are helpless take heart.
Come, let us tell of the Lord's greatness;
let us exalt his name together.*

Psalm 34:1-3

Pause and pray

In the Garden of Eden story we see God practicing hospitality, creating space and planting Adam and Eve within it. Let's reflect together on the next part of the story...

And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.'

Genesis 2:16-17

God gives lots of permission in the garden. Work it. Care for it. Eat from any tree. Except one. In the midst of radical hospitality and the invitation to mutuality, God sets a boundary firmly in place. There is one tree from which they must not eat.

Healthy and sustainable hospitality is not without boundaries. We can invite people into our hearts, our homes, our lives. But that does not mean that we give them an all access pass.

Ask

God, I ask for discernment to know what parts of my heart, my home, my life, to open to others, and what parts to hold in reserve. In the quiet, I ask You to show me where I may have given others too much or too little, and I ask You to give me the wisdom to know how to set boundary lines in pleasant places.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for those on the front lines of social justice who are working with sex workers, with children at risk, with immigrants and refugees, with addicts and those struggling with mental health.

Would You give wisdom as to what parts of their lives to extend to others and what parts to withhold?
Would You direct them into hospitable lives and practices that are also healthy and sustainable?
I name specific ones before You now and pray 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.

And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.'

Genesis 2:16-17

Edith Schaeffer of L'Abri Fellowship captures some of the tension of boundaries in hospitality when she writes that, 'because there are more people than we have time or strength to see personally and care for, it is imperative to remember that it is not sinful to be finite and limited.*

*Edith Schaeffer, *What Is a Family?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975, 1994), p201.

God is unlimited in His capacity, and still He set boundaries in place in the context of His hospitality. How much more should we, finite and limited as we are?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I acknowledge that I am a mere mortal, and that my capacity is limited. Help me to live in the tension of stretching myself and my life to make space for others, but also living within my limits. I yield myself to Your wisdom. Set the boundary lines for me in pleasant places.

Yielding Promise

Thank You Lord that in You, I have a beautiful inheritance. (Psalm 16:6)

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.

October 08 2020 (click for audio)

Feast Day: Gospel Champions

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 Johan Leonhard Dober and David Nitschmann, heroes 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 today in God's faithfulness and righteousness, 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.*

Psalm 36:5-6

Pause and pray

On this day in 1732 a Dutch ship left Copenhagen harbor for the Danish West Indies. On board were two men - the first two missionaries to be sent from the Moravian community of Herrnhut.

In his book, *The Lord of the Ring*, Phil Anderson tells us more about 36 year old Johan Leonhard Dober and 26 year old David Nitschmann, 'The two men were among the first missionaries to be sent out in Protestant church history, the first to go as lay workers rather than theologically trained ministers, the first to be sent by a church rather than a state body or society, and the first to work among slaves.*

* Phil Anderson, *The Lord of the Ring* (Baker Publishing Group) Kindle Edition. p.112

Backing them up was their Moravian community in Herrnhut, Saxony (now Eastern Germany), who were praying literally 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

'The prayer watch continued around the clock, constantly bringing the mission work before God in prayer. On congregation days, the whole community met to hear news and letters from the missionaries read out. Despite the sometimes chilling reports of sickness and opposition, they continued to volunteer for service themselves, year after year.

During the decades that followed, Moravians went to the slaves of the Caribbean, the Eskimos of Greenland and Newfoundland, the black South Africans, and the American Indians. They reached Ceylon, South America, the Far East, and the Russian and Arab worlds. By the end of the century, this tiny village of around 300 people was responsible for sending out over 1,000 missionaries to virtually every part of the known world.**

** Phil Anderson, *The Lord of the Ring* (Baker Publishing Group) Kindle Edition. p.114

Dober and Nitschmann had wanted to sell themselves into slavery. When they were prevented from doing so, they instead took manual jobs on plantations so that they could have close access to the slaves they were trying to reach.

I can just imagine these men considering their series of 'firsts'. First lay missionaries. First to be sent by a church. First to work amongst slaves. It's never been done before. Well, high time that somebody did it then!

They jumped out of the box, colored outside the lines. And they made church history.

Ask

What if God were to ask me to champion the gospel in ways that have never been done before, to forge a path for others to follow?

God, I ask for creativity and courage to innovate. Even now, in the quiet, would You show me how we can break new ground together?

Pause and pray

God, I pray for the seeds of the gospel that have been sown all over the world by Moravian missionaries - many of whom were martyred in the mission field. In Greenland, South Africa, the Caribbean, Ceylon, South America, the Far East, and the Russian and Arab world - bring life to these seeds that they would spring up again.

Pause and pray

Yield

As the ship pulled away from the docks to go to the Caribbean, it is said that Dober and Nitschmann called out to their loved ones on shore, 'May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering!'***

*** Johann Leonhard Dober and David Nitschmann, *Dreaming Beneath the Spires*

They were willing - no, beyond willing - they were compelled - to go to the extremes of trying to sell themselves into slavery, leaving everything they had known and everyone they loved, traveling to the far reaches of the earth, for the love of Jesus and a longing that Jesus might receive His reward - a people from every tongue and tribe and nation.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, I give you my selfish pre-occupation and my instinct for self-preservation. Lamb that was slain, I fix my eyes and my heart on You. I offer up myself to You today that You may you receive the reward of

Your suffering. Here I am, Lord. Send me.

Yielding Promise

Today I lean into your promise in Matthew 19, 'And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.' (Matt 19:29)

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.

October 09 2020 (click for audio)

Possibility and Disappointment

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 welcome, You invite me into Your family. I sit at Your table and savor Your word to me. Help me receive all the nourishment You have for me today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's sustenance and abundance, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 36...

How precious is your unfailing love, O God!
All humanity finds shelter
in the shadow of your wings.
You feed them from the abundance of your own house,
letting them drink from your river of delights.
For you are the fountain of life,
the light by which we see.

Psalm 36:7-9

Pause and pray

In the garden, God sets boundaries for Adam and Eve. It's a familiar story - sadly they break them, and the inevitable consequences begin to unfold...

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

Genesis 3:8-9

No longer comfortable in their vulnerability. No longer naked and unashamed. Adam and Eve are hiding from the God who is searching for them. It's the first ever game of hide and seek, but sadly it's not a game. Any serious and experienced practitioner of hospitality knows that each moment of welcome is pregnant both with possibility and with disappointment.

Ask

God, how often do I retreat from You when You come to seek me? How often, ashamed by my own transgressions, do I hide in the bushes as You pass by? God, help me to be brave, to come out of hiding, and meet with You when You call to me. I confess my sins before You now, and I hear Your voice calling me back into friendship.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for all those who feel the distance from You - who feel that they are too far gone, that they have fallen so low that they can't be found by You. Lord, in the deadly game of hide and seek, may they allow themselves to be found by You. I name lost ones before You now, and ask that You would seek, You would find, You would save.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

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

Genesis 3:8-9

'Where are you?' It's a rhetorical question. God never asks because He is looking for information. He is inviting Adam and Eve to ask themselves, 'Where are we?'

God is also showing them that He is looking for them, that in the midst of broken boundaries and disappointment, His love for them and His desire for friendship is unwavering. It's beautiful to see how in the complexity and vulnerability of hospitality, God holds out hope and invitation.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I yield myself to hope. I yield myself to invitation. I hear Your voice calling me to allow myself to be found by You. Today I receive Your hospitality again.

Yielding Promise

Thank You Lord, for the comfort and assurance of Your presence in Psalm 139: 'Where can I flee from your presence?... If I make my bed in the depths, you are there.' (Ps 139:7-8).

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.

October 10 2020 (click for audio)

World Mental Health Day

We often pause our Lectio 365 rhythm to celebrate the stories and learn from the lives of heroes of faith, whose collective witness embodies the six practices at the heart of Lectio 365, and we call these days Feast Days. Today, however, is less of a Feast Day, and more of a focus day; a day to consider the importance of our own mental health, and to pray for those who suffer with theirs.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's care and compassion, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 40...

*I waited patiently for the Lord to help me,
and he turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the pit of despair,
out of the mud and the mire.
He set my feet on solid ground
and steadied me as I walked along.
He has given me a new song to sing,
a hymn of praise to our God.*

Psalm 40:1-3

Pause and pray

World Mental Health Day was started in 1992 by a man called Richard Hunter, who at the time was the Deputy Secretary General of the World Federation for Mental Health. Over nearly thirty years, it has helped to raise awareness around the world and mobilize efforts in support of mental health.

The arrival of COVID-19 earlier this year, and the months of disruption, isolation and uncertainty since then have been hard for everyone, but they have been particularly dark and difficult for people who suffer with their mental health.

On their website, the World Health Organization (WHO) writes:

'This year's World Mental Health Day comes at a time when our daily lives have changed considerably as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The past few months have brought many challenges:

- for health-care workers, providing care in difficult circumstances, going to work fearful of bringing COVID-19 home with them;
- for school pupils, adapting to taking classes from home, with little contact with teachers and friends, and anxious about their futures;

- for workers whose livelihoods are threatened;
- for the vast number of people caught in poverty or in fragile humanitarian settings with extremely limited protection from COVID-19;
- and for people with mental health conditions, many experiencing even greater social isolation than before.

And this is to say nothing of managing the grief of losing a loved one, sometimes without being able to say goodbye.*

*<https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-mental-health-day/world-mental-health-day-2020>

How have these challenges affected me over the past few months?

[read this list slowly] Pressures with work. Health concerns. Isolation from friends. Anxiety about the future. Grief and trauma.

In spite of the fact that much has been done to raise awareness of, and reduce the stigma around, mental health, it's still not easy to talk about this stuff sometimes. It's easier for me to hold and hide everything inside, to respond with, 'I'm fine', when a friend asks how I'm doing, and to pretend that I'm OK. But it's not a good thing to do.

'Our mental health is just like our physical health,' says the charity MIND, 'everybody has it and we need to take care of it.'**

**<https://www.mind.org.uk/get-involved/world-mental-health-day/>

Ask

I imagine standing in front of a mirror for a moment. I ask myself that question: How am I doing? Am I holding or hiding anything inside?

I bring the pressures that I am experiencing to You, Spirit of God. I bring the fears and anxieties. I bring the sense of isolation and loneliness. I bring the feelings of loss and trauma. I cast all of my cares on You, grateful in the knowledge that You care for me. (1 Peter 5:7)

Pause and pray

I think now about my friends and my family. Who do I know has been suffering with their mental health recently? Perhaps with some of the challenges already mentioned, or perhaps with the deep darkness of depression, or with crippling anxiety.

In the quiet, I name these people before You, Loving Father. I bring them to You and I ask You to draw near to them today (James 4:8), to protect them and heal them.

Pause and pray

I also think about those who work to help those who are suffering. For mental health nurses and therapists, psychiatrists and counselors, and the many thousands who voluntarily care for someone they love.

I ask You, Spirit of God, to encourage them and refresh them today. Fill them with strength and even greater compassion.

Pause and pray**Yield**

According to the World Health Organization, 'half of all mental illness begins by the age of 14, but most cases go undetected and untreated.'***

***<https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2018/10/10/default-calendar/world-mental-health-day-2018>

Many children and young people suffer in silence with anxiety and depression.

I pause for a moment to let this uncomfortable truth sink in just a little bit.

I think about the children and young people that I know; those who are part of my church community, my friends and relatives, perhaps my own children.

I bring them before You, Heavenly Father, and I name those who come to mind, one by one. I ask You to be close to those that particularly need Your comfort right now. And help me to show care for them too, to encourage and strengthen them in any way that I can.

Pause and pray**Yielding Prayer**

God, I surrender all of myself to You today. I offer my body, my soul, my spirit and especially on this World Mental Health Day, I offer my mind to You too.

Yielding Promise

I trust in the assurance of Paul's letter to the Church in Rome, that You are renewing my mind and transforming me, day by day.(Romans 12:2)

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.

October 11 2020 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Prayer

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

Pause and pray

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

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

Psalm 23 (NIV)

Pause and pray

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pause and pray

Sabbath blessing

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

May God's image in you be restored, and your imagination in God be re-storied.

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

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

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

*Pete Greig, Sabbath Blessing, petegreig.info

October 12 (click for audio)

What's In A Name?

This week we're exploring the biblical priority of creativity through the books of Genesis and Exodus as part of our Following Ancient Paths season.

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

Creator God, who formed us from dust, breathe in me again. Give me a new imagination to perceive greater possibilities today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's power and might, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 46...

*God is our refuge and strength,
always ready to help in times of trouble.
So we will not fear when earthquakes come
and the mountains crumble into the sea.*

Psalm 46:1-2

Pause and pray

Today I reflect on a moment of creativity in Genesis chapter 2. God has spoken light, the solar system, our planet, vegetation, living creatures and finally humanity into being. Creation is almost complete, and God is inviting Adam to add the finishing touches...

Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found.

Genesis 2:19-20

Naming my children was challenging. Meanings, nicknames and potential future teasing had to be considered. It took time, but finally names were chosen that reflected our family, our gratitude to God and our hopes for their future.

In this passage, God invites Adam into the act of creation through the naming of living things. I wonder, did God like the names Adam chose? 'Really Adam? You're going to go with Beetle?'

Why would God delegate such creative and important decisions?

Ask

Names identify. They help us communicate, but they can also carry a hidden power that influences our perception of the things we name. What names or nicknames have I been given?

God, I ask You to show me how they have shaped my identity and my self-worth. Show me the truth where it's been distorted. Heal the wounds that some names have inflicted.

Pause and pray

Who will I encounter today?

God, how do You name these people? I ask You to give me an opportunity to name them, to encourage them to be all You created them to be, and to pray with 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.

Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found.

Genesis 2:19-20

As I read this passage again, I am struck by how generous God is in His creativity. If I produced a masterpiece even close to the nobility of a blue whale, or the beauty of a hummingbird, could I be as generous, sharing the finishing touches of their creation with another?

God is the first and greatest artist in the universe. He invited Adam and now He invites me into creating and curating it with Him. How will I respond to that invitation today?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Thank you, God, for the incredible beauty and ingenuity displayed in Your creation. I am awed by Your imagination and attention to detail. I yield to Your creative work in me and through me today.

Yielding Promise

I thank You God, that through Jesus, I am a new creation; the old has gone and the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

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.

October 13 (click for audio)

Out of Isolation

Together we will P.R.A.Y. each day – ‘P’: PAUSING to be still. ‘R’: REJOICING with a Psalm and REFLECTING on a Scripture. ‘A’: ASKING God to help us, and ‘Y’: YIELDING to His will in our lives that day, 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

Creator God, who formed us from dust, breathe in me again. Give me a new imagination to perceive greater possibilities today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's majesty, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 46...

*"Be still, and know that I am God!
I will be honored by every nation.
I will be honored throughout the world."
The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us;
the God of Israel is our fortress.
Psalm 46:10-11*

Pause and pray

Yesterday, I explored how God generously included Adam in the process of naming all He had made. Today I reflect on the final moment of the creation story described in Genesis chapter 2...

*So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.
The man said,
'This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called "woman",
for she was taken out of man.'
Genesis 2:21-23*

God's compassion fueled God's creativity to make Adam a partner. This is an intimate and world-changing creative act. Adam moves from isolation to relationship.

The God who is both one and, mysteriously, three - Father, Son and Spirit - wasn't satisfied until He shared the joy of relationship. I am created in God's image. A longing for community is deep within my design.

Ask

I think about my relationships: my family, my friends, my church community, the people I work or study with, those I nod to around my neighborhood, or pause and say hello to at the school gates. Who encourages, challenges and inspires me to grow more like Jesus?

God, I ask You for creative direction to strengthen those friendships. Help me give as much, if not more, than I receive.

Pause and pray

Who is suffering as a result of relational breakdown today? I think of friends who have fallen out, family members who are feuding and couples who are struggling.

God, I name them and ask you to bring healing where needed, and reconciliation where possible.

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.

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

*'This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called "woman",
for she was taken out of man.'*

Genesis 2:21-23

Today, through social media and digital communication, I have unprecedented access to people all over the globe. Yet, at the same time, there is a disturbing rise in loneliness. The isolation and lock down caused by the COVID-19 pandemic hasn't helped!

Researchers now report that living alone or in social isolation can increase your chances of premature death by 29%.* Loneliness is hazardous to my health!

*<https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/the-facts-on-loneliness>

Am I lonely? Who are the isolated and lonely in my community? Can I create new opportunities for connection and friendship today?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, draw my attention to specific people. I surrender my plans and offer myself as an uninterrupted, available friend. Jesus, motivate me to be present with the overlooked and meet me in my own loneliness.

Yielding Promise

Thank you, Jesus that You promise that as I remain in You, You also remain in me. I am never, truly alone. (John 15:4)

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.

October 14 (click for audio)

Bring Your Bling

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

Creator God, who formed us from dust, breathe in me again. Give me a new imagination to perceive greater possibilities today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in the magnificence of God, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 46...

*Come, everyone! Clap your hands!
Shout to God with joyful praise!
For the Lord Most High is awesome.
He is the great King of all the earth.
Psalm 46:1-2*

Pause and pray

Today, I reflect on a creative project given by God to His people. The nation of Israel is gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai. God's manifest presence has descended on its summit, and Israel's leader Moses is meeting with Him...

The Lord said to Moses, 'Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give. These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ram skins dyed red and another type of durable leather; acacia wood; olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece.

'Then let them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.'
Exodus 25:1-8

In the chapters before this passage, God gave Israel the law - instructions for how they should live. Now, in these, the first detailed blue-prints for the Tabernacle - God is sharing how *He* will live *with them*.

Rich materials are described: precious metals, colorful fabrics, leather, oils, incense and valuable gems. This opulent tent will become the primary place of connection between heaven and earth, the space in which God's presence will dwell in a special way. It won't be a flimsy, plain, flat-pack construction, but a work of art crafted from the generosity of His people.

Ask

The Israelites were invited to offer the materials needed to create God's dwelling place however their hearts prompted them.

God, what can I give You today? How can I give my resources, my wealth, my creative gifts, my time and my work as worship?

Pause and pray

God, I ask You to provide for the artists, songwriters, crafts people, architects, authors, film makers and creatives I know.

I name them now and ask You to release the resources they need to create captivating works of art that glorify and reflect You. God, am I part of Your plan to provide?

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 said to Moses, 'Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give. These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ram skins dyed red and another type of durable leather; acacia wood; olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece.

'Then let them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.'

Exodus 25:1-8

I was walking through the Italian city of Florence when I was brought to a standstill, in the middle of a busy pavement. I had unexpectedly caught sight of The Duomo, the city's breathtaking Cathedral. Yet the Duomo, and even the Tabernacle described in Exodus are nothing compared to the place God has created to host His presence today.

From Jesus, who 'tabernacled' among us (John 1:14), came the gift of the Spirit - the personal presence of God who now dwells in me, in us - the Church. We are God's living Temple (1 Corinthians 3:16), a work of art in progress. Together we are being sculpted and shaped as we carry the presence of the Creator to creation.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, thank you that You are the Potter and I am like clay in Your hands. Shape me, fill me again with Your Holy Spirit and help me to glorify and worship You with my creativity today.

Yielding Promise

Thank You, God for the reality and promise that we are Your temple and that Your Spirit lives among us. (1 Corinthians 3:16)

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.

October 15 (click for audio)

Teresa of Avila – Hero of Prayer

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 Teresa of Ávila, a hero of prayer.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's love and provision, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 48...

*O God, we meditate on your unfailing love
as we worship in your Temple.
As your name deserves, O God,
you will be praised to the ends of the earth.
Your strong right hand is filled with victory.
Psalm 48:9-10*

Pause and pray

Teresa of Ávila was born in 1515. A Spanish noblewoman and Carmelite nun, she founded religious communities across Spain and was used by God to bring renewal and reformation to the Carmelite order. Teresa has the distinction of being declared a Doctor of the Church and is recognized as one of the masters of prayer across two millennia of church history.

She is known as 'a mystic as gifted in prayer as was Rembrandt in art, Beethoven in music or Shakespeare in literature'*

* Robert Atwell, *Celebrating the Saints: Daily Spiritual Readings for the Calendars of the Church of England, the Church of Ireland, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church in Wales* (Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition) Kindle Locations 11937-11938

Dallas Willard says of her seminal work, *The Interior Castle*, that 'The book provided instruction on a living relationship with God that I had found nowhere else...the finest treatments of union with Christ and with God that I have found in spiritual literature.'**

** From *Teresa Of Avila: Selections From The Interior Castle*, Harpercollins Spiritual Classics, 2004, Pp. XIII-XI. Also available in *The Great Omission*, San Francisco: Harpercollins, 2006, Pp. 206 – 209.x

The thing I find encouraging about Teresa, is that like most of the rest of us, she started out struggling in prayer!

Teresa once wrote, 'Over a period of several years, I was more occupied in wishing my hour of prayer were over, and in listening whenever the clock struck, than in thinking of things that were good...Whenever I entered the oratory I used to feel so depressed that I had to summon up all my courage to make myself pray at all.'***

*** Robert Atwell, *Celebrating the Saints: Daily Spiritual Readings for the Calendars of the Church of England, the Church of Ireland, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church in Wales* (Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition) Kindle Locations 11953-11956

There is a famous (and endearing) account of Teresa shaking her hourglass in a vain attempt to make her hour of prayer go faster!

Teresa's struggles with prayer continued over her first 20 years in the convent - yep – count 'em - 20 years! But she persevered, battled her way through the barriers, and eventually discovered the pathway to prayer.

Ask

Do I struggle with prayer, finding it hard to get started and then just wishing the time would go faster, that these Lectio 365 readers would just speed it up a bit?

Lord, give me patience and perseverance. Set my heart on a quest for You and may I seek You until I find You.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for those who have been on a long journey in prayer, and are in dry, difficult places; who feel like they are walking in circles in spiritual deserts. God, I ask for streams in their deserts, and ultimately, would You come and rain down your love upon them?

Pause and pray

Yield

As Teresa of Avila says in *The Interior Castle*, 'The important thing (in prayer) is not to think much but to love much.' The goal of prayer is the encounter with God in love. And love, as Teresa goes on to say, 'consists, not in the extent of our happiness, but in the firmness of our determination to try to please God in everything.' Thus prayer involves the heart and will of man, even more fundamentally. ****

**** Thomas H. Green, *Opening to God: A Guide to Prayer* (Kindle Edition) Kindle Locations 289-291

If I'm really honest, what is my goal in prayer? Sometimes what I'm after is relief from an uncomfortable situation. Other times, I'm chasing warm fuzzy feelings in God's presence.

God, would You take me out of the center of my little universe and help me learn to revolve around you in a loving orbit?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I want to live a life worthy of You, and please You in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of who you are (Colossians 1:10). Teach me to pray.

Yielding Promise

I trust your promise in Jeremiah 29:12-14, “Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you” declares the Lord’

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.

October 16 (click for audio)

The Master Architect

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

Creator God, who formed us from dust, breathe in me again. Give me a new imagination to perceive new possibilities today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's beauty and glory, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 50...

*The Lord, the Mighty One, is God,
and he has spoken;
he has summoned all humanity
from where the sun rises to where it sets.
From Mount Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God shines in glorious radiance
Psalm 50:1-2*

Pause and pray

Today I continue to reflect on God's conversation with Moses in Exodus chapter 25. The people of Israel have been invited to offer gifts of precious metals, textiles and gems, and now God is describing how He wants them to be used...

Let them make an ark of acacia wood – two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold molding around it... Make an atonement cover of pure gold – two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover... There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.

Exodus 25:10-11, 17-18, 22

This passage, and the following chapters of Exodus, are detailed blueprints for the Tabernacle. God is a Master Architect, commissioning a portable Palace and He starts with the focal point - the Ark of the Covenant.

Crowning this ornate chest were two gold cherubim. In Genesis 3 these fearsome creatures guarded the entrance to Eden, the first place God and humanity met face-to-face. The cherubim's presence here in the Tabernacle must have been a potent reminder to every priest who approached: this is now the primary place where God and humanity meet.

Ask

I imagine what the Ark of the Covenant must have looked like - it sounds breathtaking. Though I do

not approach God through the tabernacle, beauty moves and humbles me, waking me up to His presence. Sculpture, song and the sea have all impacted me profoundly, provoking me to praise, to gratitude and drawing me into deep encounters.

God, where can I encounter and worship You in beauty today?

Pause and pray

Lord, I think of someone I know who feels like their life is dull, grey, uniform and colorless. I ask You to open their eyes and meet them today in beauty. Bring color and life to their heart, mind and soul.

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.

Let them make an ark of acacia wood – two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold molding around it... Make an atonement cover of pure gold – two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover... There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.

Exodus 25:10-11, 17-18, 22

The Ark was made of acacia wood, as was much of the furniture and structure of the Tabernacle. It's a common, everyday wood that was given a special place, crafted and decorated with great care, right at the heart of God's dwelling place.

I sometimes feel like acacia wood - ordinary and commonplace - but God treats me with special care and includes me in His presence and invites me to worship.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Thank You, God, that You include the ordinary, bringing out beauty and weaving us all into Your design. I yield to You the Master Architect. Craft me as Your dwelling place today.

Yielding Promise

I join with the Psalmist and pray, 'I praise you [God] because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.' (Psalm 139:14)

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.

October 17 (click for audio)

Artisans Assemble

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

Creator God, who formed us from dust, breathe in me again. Give me a new imagination to perceive greater possibilities today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's constant presence, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 52...

*But I am like an olive tree, thriving in the house of God.
I will always trust in God's unfailing love.
I will praise you forever, O God,
for what you have done.
I will trust in your good name
in the presence of your faithful people.
Psalm 52:8-9*

Pause and pray

For the past few days I've been reflecting on God, the Master Architect, detailing breathtaking blueprints for the place His presence will dwell at the heart of the community of Israel. Today I reflect on the people God chose to bring His designs to life...

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'See I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills – to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts.'
Exodus 31:1-5

This is the first specific mention in the Bible of God filling someone with His Spirit. I find it fascinating that the person chosen isn't a politician, an entrepreneur or a religious leader, but an artisan - a craftsman.

God equips and empowers Bezalel to bring His plans, His art to life. What a collaboration! The amazing thing is, that by the Holy Spirit, God also equips and empowers me.

Ask

Where do I express my creativity? Is it in the way I dress? Is it in my parenting? Am I artistic? Can I see new possibilities? Am I a problem solver, an out-of-the-box thinker? In what ways do I reflect God's creativity?

I welcome You, Holy Spirit. Fill me like You filled Bezalel. Help me collaborate with You today for Your glory.

Pause and pray

I pause now and choose someone I know - maybe a carpenter, an architect, a photographer, a baker, a barista or someone who expresses their creativity in another way.

I ask You God to give them what You gave to Bezalel: wisdom, understanding, knowledge and all kinds of skills by your Spirit. Lord, how can I encourage them 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.

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'See I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills – to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts.'

Exodus 31:1-5

Eugene Peterson paraphrases Jesus' words in Matthew 5, 'Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth... Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world.' (Matthew 5:13-14 MSG)

My challenge today is to notice where God is creatively at work in people and in situations, and to collaborate with Him. To bring out the many flavors and colors so that people taste and see how good God is. (Psalm 34:8)

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Francis Shaeffer writes, 'No work of art is more important than the Christian's own life... [it] is to be a thing of truth and also a thing of beauty in the midst of a lost world.' * *Lord, I yield my whole life to You again. Make me something of truth and beauty in the midst of a lost world today.*

*Francis A. Shaeffer, *Art and the Bible*, p94

Yielding Promise

Thank You God that you promise in the Psalms that not only can we taste and see Your goodness, but that we can take refuge in You too. (Psalm 34:8)

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.

October 18 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Prayer

Today we pause our normal rhythm and pray a special Sabbath prayer.

‘Forget the former things,’ says the Lord, ‘Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!’ (Isaiah 43:18–19).

Pause and pray

I make the words of Psalm 51 my prayer...

*Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
Psalm 51:10–12 (NIVUK)*

Pause and pray

‘Sabbath,’ writes John Koessler, ‘affords a rest by which we are not so much restored as re-storyed.’* And so, as God’s people gather around the world today, I pray for new chapters to be written in our midst.

*John Koessler, *The Radical Pursuit of Jesus*, p.106

Father, re-story us today. We ‘stand at the crossroads’ and ‘ask for the ancient paths’ (Jeremiah 6:16). Root us in the faith of our fathers and mothers, as we participate this day in Your Word.

Jesus, maker of tables and teller of stories, create in us a new imagination, we pray. Invoke in us greater celebration. And grant to us new language with which to sow Your eternal Word into a tired world.

Creator Spirit, You who moved over the darkness and gave the chaos form, inspire new songs of worship. Disrupt our religious attitudes. Draw artists, prophets and innovators from the peripheries of our communities right to the heart.

I take a moment now to earth these big prayers personally in my own life. I name an artist or innovator I know and remember friends who are finding life particularly tough today.

Pause and pray

At the start of this new week, I ask God to help me live a celebratory life:

Thank You, Father, for the wonder, the beauty and complexity of Your creation.

Renew my soul this week to celebrate Your creativity.

Thank You, Jesus, for overcoming the dreariness of sin and making everything new.

Renew me this week, I pray, to live almost as beautifully as You.

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for inspiring dreams and visions, imagination and innovation.

Give me a new mind this week to perceive fresh possibilities in ordinary things.

Pause and pray

Sabbath Blessing

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

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

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

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

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

**Pete Greig, Sabbath Blessing, petegreig.info

[October 19 2020 \(click for audio\)](#)

Coats and Dreams

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

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 rejoice today in all the excellent things God does, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 105:

*Give thanks to the Lord and proclaim his greatness.
Let the whole world know what he has done.
Sing to him; yes, sing his praises.
Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds.
Psalm 105:1-2*

Pause and pray

This week I am reflecting on the story of Joseph. His mission will be to convey God's blessing to the nations. But his path will not be an easy one. Indeed, his life reads like the plot of a Hollywood movie – a teenage boy has a dream, it turns into a nightmare, but he triumphs in the end.

Today we begin the story with Joseph at home with his dad, Jacob, also known as Israel, and it's complicated...

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, 'Listen to this dream I had: we were binding sheaves of corn out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered round mine and bowed down to it.' His brothers said to him, 'Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?' And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. Genesis 37:3-8

The translators of the King James Bible described Joseph's ornate robe as 'a coat of many colors', but *akehoneth passim* is more interesting than that; it was a garment worn by the son or daughter of a king (2 Samuel 13:18). This wasn't just a fancy jacket for Joseph to show off in, it was a sign that he was marked out for greatness.

Following the way of Jesus may mean my life choices differ from those of other people, even those close to me. However, sometimes it can feel embarrassing to wear my 'robe of kindness and justice' in public.

Ask

Lord, I ask for boldness. Help me never to be self-righteous or annoying, but to always honor You in the way I live. I ask myself, what is God calling me to that might mark me out from the crowd?

Pause and pray

Lord, You have blessed me with many good things and have given me purpose. Help me to remember that the gifts which I have received are not for me because I am special, but so that I may serve others.

Who can I help and serve 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.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, 'Listen to this dream I had: we were binding sheaves of corn out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered round mine and bowed down to it.' His brothers said to him, 'Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?' And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. Genesis 37:3-8

Joseph was young and certainly unwise in the way he told his story to his brothers. The dream was genuine, but the telling smacked of ego. He relished the idea of his older brothers bowing before him.

It was very different when, on the 28th of August 1963, the 34 year old Dr Martin Luther King Jr. stood at the Washington Memorial and gave perhaps the greatest speech of the 20th Century; 'I have a dream,' he said, 'that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin.' He knew his mission – to give voice to the voiceless and bring justice where there was none.

But, like Joseph, his dream challenged the assumptions of many who heard his words. And, like Joseph he was hated for his dream and for what he had said.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Father, I yield to Your dream for my life. Help me to abandon my small ambitions and to open my heart to Your bigger calling and purpose, so that, whatever the cost, my life might make a difference in the world.

Yielding Promise

Today, I take strength from God's promise in Romans 8:28, so that, no matter what trouble I face or what mistakes I make along the way: 'We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.'

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.

October 20 2020 (click for audio)

Death of a Dream

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

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I rejoice today in the strength I find in God’s presence, joining in the ancient praise of all God’s people in the words of Psalm 105:

*Exult in his holy name;
rejoice, you who worship the Lord.
Search for the Lord and for his strength;
continually seek him.*
Psalm 105:3-4

Pause and pray

Today I’m reflecting on the devastating contradictions which Joseph begins to encounter on the path to fulfilling his mission to bring God’s blessing to nations. Joseph’s dreams, once so vivid, turn quickly to dust. On one fateful day, as his brothers are looking after their flocks of sheep, Joseph is sent to find them...

Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. ‘Here comes that dreamer!’ they said to each other. ‘Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.’ ...

As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

Judah said to his brothers, ‘What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites.

Genesis 37:17b-20;25-27a

‘Here comes the dream-master!’ (Gen 37:19 ISV) his brothers remark sarcastically. Enraged with envy they plan to make his death look like an accident. The favorite son is spared only by his brothers’ greed and they sell him to slave-traders.

I remember times when I have faced seemingly impossible setbacks that threatened to destroy all hope for the future. Joseph encourages me, reminding me that sometimes dreams must die if they are to be resurrected without my ego getting in the way.

Ask

I am reminded of Job’s prayer on the worst day of his life: ‘The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.’ Job 1:21

And so, even when I don’t understand what is going on around me, let alone why it is happening, Lord, help me to put my trust in You. May Your name be praised.

Pause and pray

Lord, help me always to be kind to others I meet, because I have no idea what trials, what feelings of abandonment, what hurt, what rejection or even violence and abuse they may be facing, even from those closest to them.

I remember someone I know who is facing great difficulty now, and I ask You Lord to be near them and give them hope.

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.

Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. ‘Here comes that dreamer!’ they said to each other. ‘Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.’ ...

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Judah said to his brothers, ‘What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites.

Genesis 37:17b-20;25-27a

For his 1977 album, *Love Broke Thru*, Christian guitarist, Phil Keaggy, wrote a song called *Disappointment*. Or rather, he wrote the tune. The words had been penned almost a century earlier by a little-known poet, Laura Sophia Soole.

Disappointment—His appointment;
Change one letter, then I see.
That the thwarting of my purpose.
Is God's better choice for me.*

*Laura Sophia Soole, 'Disappointment - His Appointment', *Home Words for Heart and Hearth* (Rev Charles Bullock, ed.) 1893, p.248

Her words had been inspired by Job 23:14 (King James Version) as the poet reflected on the setbacks she had experienced in her own life: 'He performeth the thing that is appointed for me.'

This too was Joseph's story. The path to great influence was not going to be easy.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Father, I yield to everything which You have appointed for me. I choose to hold my dreams and hopes lightly, even the ones which I believe are from You. Help me to stop trying to make things happen and to trust that You will bring all good things to pass in Your time.

Yielding Promise

Today, I take strength from God's promise in Philippians 1:6, 'being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.'

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.*

[October 21 2020 \(click for audio\)](#)

Do The Right Thing

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 rejoice today in God's enduring love, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 106:

*Praise the Lord!
Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!
His faithful love endures forever.
Who can list the glorious miracles of the Lord?
Who can ever praise him enough?
Psalm 106:1-2*

Pause and pray

Today I'm reflecting on the setbacks Joseph faced when he tried to do the right thing, and how God was still with him through it all...

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master... The Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, 'Come to bed with me!' But he refused. 'With me in charge,' he told her, 'my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care... How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?'

Genesis 39:1-2, 5b-8, 9b

Joseph was determined to be the best he could be. And so it was, that this handsome boy was faced with hot temptation on a plate. Still, Joseph held to his integrity. He may have been a slave, but he wasn't going to live like a slave; in his mind's eye he still wore the royal coat his father had given him; he still had dreams of greatness; he was thinking like a prince in Israel. And so, knowing who he really was, despite his circumstances, he held to his convictions to do the right thing.

Ask

Where am I vulnerable to temptation? What appetite could be my downfall?

In the words of the Lord's Prayer, Father, don't let me be led into temptation today. Give me the strength to do the right thing.

Pause and pray

Lord, I ask You to strengthen those I know who are struggling with temptations to compromise their integrity today.

Christian leaders often seem to face an even more intense spiritual battle than others. As I think of a leader I know, I ask You Lord to always give them the strength to do the right thing.

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.

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master... The Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, 'Come to bed with me!' But he refused. 'With me in charge,' he told her, 'my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care... How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?'

Genesis 39:1-2, 5b-8, 9b

Joseph was determined to do the right thing. He recognized where he was vulnerable and so he refused to be alone with Potiphar's wife.

But one day, when there was no one else in the house, she grabbed his garment – probably a short linen kilt – and he fled outside, leaving the garment in her hand. Scorned by a slave, she accused him of rape. Potiphar became enraged and threw Joseph in prison.

And yet, the story continues, ‘the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.’ (Genesis 39:21)

I am reminded that sometimes when I do what is right, things seem to get worse, but that doesn’t ever mean that God has abandoned me.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Father, I yield to Your best will for my life. I want to live with integrity. Shine the light of Your truth into the deepest parts of me.

Is there someone I need to talk to about this today - a confidant(e) who can help me stand strong?

Yielding Promise

Today, I take strength from God’s promise in Ephesians 1:3-4, that, ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... chose [me] in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.’

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.

October 22 2020 (click for audio)

Delayed Hope

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 rejoice today in the steadiness of God, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 40...

*I waited patiently for the Lord to help me,
and he turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the pit of despair,
out of the mud and the mire.
He set my feet on solid ground.
and steadied me as I walked along.
He has given me a new song to sing,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see what he has done and be amazed.
They will put their trust in the Lord.*

Psalm 40:1-3

Pause and pray

Today I'm reflecting on the long delay which Joseph faced on the way to fulfilling his mission to bring a blessing to the nations in a time of trouble.

Joseph is falsely accused and confined in the place where Pharaoh's personal prisoners are held. Still, the Lord is with him. Joseph finds favor with the warden; and is placed in charge of the entire prison...

Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master [...] Pharaoh was angry with his two officials [...] and put them in custody [...] in the same prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them. After they had been in custody for some time, each of the two men [...] had a dream [...] When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. So he asked [...], 'Why do you look so sad today?' 'We both had dreams,' they answered, 'but there is no one to interpret them.' Then Joseph said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.' So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream.

Genesis 40:1-9

More than ten years have passed. Betrayed, enslaved and imprisoned, Joseph has learned kindness through suffering. Charged with serving two disgraced Royal officials, he empathizes with their sorrow. ‘Tell me your dreams’, he says, because now he knows that other people’s dreams matter as much as his own.

Charles Colson, Chief Counsel to US President Nixon, was disgraced and imprisoned at the time of The Watergate Scandal. Once amongst the most powerful men in America, he felt empathy for his fellow inmates. He wrote, “My greatest humiliation—being sent to prison—was the beginning of God’s greatest use of my life.”* In 1976 he set up Prison Fellowship, which now operates in thousands of prisons around the world, showing ‘Christ’s love to prisoners by coming alongside them and supporting them.’**

*<https://www.prisonfellowship.org/2016/03/the-legacy-of-failure/>

**<https://prisonfellowship.org.uk>

Ask

Am I feeling restricted – imprisoned by circumstances which I didn’t plan? Perhaps there is a lesson I have been slow to learn, and this is my classroom?

Lord, open my eyes.

Pause and pray

Are there skills which I can use now to help others? Father, I choose to take the focus off my troubles, my concerns, and my hopes. Help me to notice my neighbors and their needs. How can I show love 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.

Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master [...] Pharaoh was angry with his two officials [...] and put them in custody [...] in the same prison where Joseph was confined. The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them. After they had been in custody for some time, each of the two men [...] had a dream [...] When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. So he asked [...], ‘Why do you look so sad today?’ ‘We both had dreams,’ they answered, ‘but there is no one to interpret them.’ Then Joseph said to them, ‘Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.’ So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream.

Genesis 40:1-9

Later in this story Joseph tells the chief cupbearer his dream means that within three days he will be back pouring wine in the palace. Joseph seizes his opportunity. ‘When all goes well with you,’ he says, ‘mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison.’ (Genesis 40:14). But ‘the chief cupbearer...

forgot him.' (v23). After a decade of setbacks and disappointments; now Joseph must bear the burden of delayed hope.

Joseph is anxious for his own freedom. God has bigger plans.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

*Father I yield to your timing for my life; forgive me my anxious impatience. Teach me to wait on you and, 'Above all,' to 'trust in the slow work of God'****

****Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, *Hearts on Fire: Praying With Jesuits*, (Michael Harter, editor. Loyola University Press) 2005*

Yielding Promise

Today, I take strength from the assurance I find in Ecclesiastes 3:11, that God 'has made everything beautiful in its time.'

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.

October 23 2020 (click for audio)

Salvation and Shadow

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 rejoice today in God's awesome power, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 77...

*You are the God of great wonders!
You demonstrate your awesome power among the nations.
By your strong arm, you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.
Psalm 77:14-15*

Pause and pray

Today I'm reflecting on Joseph's moment of elevation. It begins with another series of dreams, but this time it is the king who wakes up troubled. Pharaoh calls for his wise men, who can discern no meaning in his reveries. But then the chief cupbearer remembers a man he met in prison. Dragged from his dungeon, shaved, bathed, and robed, Joseph is brought to Pharaoh saying, 'God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.' (Genesis 41:16)

Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams and presents a plan of action to survive the coming famine...

Pharaoh asked [his officials], 'Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?' Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.' So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.' Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain round his neck. He made him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, 'Make way!' Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

Genesis 41:38-43

It says in Psalm 105, 'Until the time came to fulfill his dreams, the Lord tested Joseph's character.' (Psalm 105:19 NLT). Joseph has nurtured a vision through years of contradictions; but he has learned

through tough trials, and this is graduation day! Now at last the dream meets the need which calls for its fulfillment.

Frederick Buechner wrote, 'The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.*

*Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seekers' ABC*, p.119

Like Joseph, if I see a need and I have a passion and a plan to bring a solution, then this just might be my moment.

Ask

God, what lessons do You want to teach me on the road to ever more effective mission? May I be ready today for the opportunity to serve others well and to make a difference.

Pause and pray

Lord, I name people I know who have been raised to significant positions of authority or influence. May they use their power, or celebrity, as currency to bring about change** - to speed the kingdom, feed the hungry, free the oppressed, liberate the wrongfully imprisoned and establish justice.

**Bono: 'Celebrity is a currency that should be used to bring about change.' *The East African Magazine*, April 10, 2010 <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/magazine/bono-celebrity-is-a-currency-to-be-used-to-bring-about-change-1298328>

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.

Pharaoh asked [his officials], 'Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?' Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.' So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.' Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain round his neck. He made him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, 'Make way!' Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

Genesis 41:38-43

It would be easy to finish the story here, but I see a shadow-side to Joseph's success.

In feeding the hungry through seven years of famine, his actions save countless lives; but this once imprisoned immigrant and former slave has joined Egypt's elite; he now stands firmly with Pharaoh. In Genesis 47 it says that 'Joseph reduced the people to servitude, from one end of Egypt to another' (Genesis 47:21).

I find myself wondering about the choices that Joseph made and why he made them. Was he unwilling to challenge the oppressive system he was part of, or did he simply choose to try to do the good that he could within it?

What about me? Where am I challenging oppression in the relationships and organizations that I am part of? In what ways am I part of the problem?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, may I never see service and mission as my pathway to privilege. I yield to you the desire to lord it over others.

Yielding Promise

May I always remember the Apostle Paul's words to the Galatians, 'You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.' (Galatians 5:13 NRSVA)

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.

[October 24 2020 \(click for audio\)](#)

Reconciled

This is the final day that we'll be exploring the biblical priority of Mission and applying it to our lives, as part of our Following Ancient Paths season.

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 rejoice today in the boundless love of God, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 86...

*Give me happiness, O Lord,
for I give myself to you.
O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive,
so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help.*
Psalm 86:4-5

Pause and pray

Today I'm reflecting on the choices Joseph makes when, after a decade and a half, his brothers walk back into his world. No longer the dreaming teen in a flashy robe they had sold to slave-traders, Joseph is now the man in power as his weary brothers roll in to buy grain. Not recognizing this lord of Egypt, Joseph plays with their emotions and their loyalties. But on their second visit, he can hide the truth no longer...

Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, 'Make everyone leave my presence!' So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph! Is my father still living?' But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come close to me.' When they had done so, he said, 'I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five

years there will be no ploughing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

*'So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.
Genesis 45:1-8a*

Sibling rivalry runs through the book of Genesis – Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau; each is a story of two brothers, only one of whom is chosen to bear God's blessing to the next generation. The tale of Joseph and his brothers is different because, in spite of a trail of betrayal, violence and deceit, each sibling has a part to play in God's story; their descendants become the tribes of Israel. Joseph had once dreamt of his brothers bowing to him, but only through tears can he now say, 'Come close to me.' On this family reconciliation rests the salvation of the world.

Ask

Father, open my eyes that I may clearly see that, whatever I may think my mission in life is, Your way is always through love and reconciliation.

Is there someone who should be as a brother or sister to me, yet I have become distanced from them through neglect, hurt or offense? Could I invite them once again to come close to me?

Pause and pray

Father, you 'reconciled us to [yourself] through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation' (2 Corinthians 5:18). I pray for someone I know who has walked away from You; may they 'be reconciled to God' (2 Cor 5:20).

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.

Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, 'Make everyone leave my presence!' So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

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*'So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.
Genesis 45:1-8a*

Instead of being bitter towards his brothers after their cruel betrayal, Joseph never allowed their actions to define his life. Long before, he had chosen the pathway of ‘a long obedience in the same direction’*. No matter what life threw at him Joseph trusted God and His purposes. So, now he was able to forgive and say truthfully, ‘it was not you who sent me here, but God.’

*Quote taken from Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, translated from German by Helen Zimmern, in Peterson, Eugene, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, (IVP, 2000).

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I yield my life, my purpose, my mission to you. May I walk the path of a long obedience in your direction. I entrust my future to you, knowing that, whatever I face, you are always working in my life for good.

Yielding Promise

Thank you, Lord, for Your promise in Romans that in all things You are working for ‘the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.’ (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.*

[October 25 2020 \(click for audio\)](#)

A Sabbath Prayer

Today, we leave our usual P.R.A.Y. rhythms behind and pray in a simpler way, on this day of rest.

‘Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath,’ writes Rabbi Abraham Heschel, ‘we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul.’*

* Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (FSG Classics) p.1

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

Pause and pray

This week, I’ve been exploring the biblical priority of mission but today I stop striving to save the world and instead make space for the Lord to preach the gospel to me, to come and save me. Sunday is a day to be born again - again! And so I take time now to get right with God, to repent of my sins, to give thanks for the cross, to receive the Spirit once more.

Pause and pray

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

Lord, You told us to ask the Father to send out workers to bring in the harvest. This we must do. Please ignite a renewed passion for the gospel in our lives and a sense of urgency in our churches. May we preach the way of salvation clearly today, so that many might see and believe and put their trust in You. Mobilize us as a missionary movement, wherever we live and to every tribe and tongue.

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

I take a moment now to earth these big prayers in my own life, naming friends, family members or colleagues who don’t yet know Jesus. I ask for opportunities to share ‘the hope that (I) have’ (1 Pet. 3:15) with at least one of these people this week.

Pause and pray

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

Thank You, Father, that You loved the world so much that You sent Your only Son, Please help me to love the world with extraordinary generosity.

Thank You, Jesus, that You gave up everything and died for me. Please help me to lay down my life for those who don’t yet know You.

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for giving those first disciples such courage and power. Please fill me now with that same boldness this week.

Pause and pray

Sabbath blessing

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

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

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

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

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

**Pete Greig, Sabbath Blessing, petegreig.info

October 26 (click for audio)

Strange Lands

This week we will focus our prayers on the wider effects of the corona virus crisis by exploring the biblical metaphor of exile. How are we, as the people of God, to sing the song of the Lord in this strange land?

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 these dark and difficult times, grant me grace to seek Your face with undiminished love. Replenish my reserves for the road is long. Surprise me in the coming day with glimpses of Your goodness, hints of your holiness, and a song of hope in this very strange land.

Rejoice and Reflect

I rejoice today in God's strength, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 59:

*But as for me, I will sing about your power.
Each morning I will sing with joy about your unfailing love.
For you have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress.
O my Strength, to you I sing praises, for you, O God, are my refuge, the God who shows me unfailing love.
Psalm 59:16-17*

Pause and pray

Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian Empire in 587BC. The people of Judah were captured and taken 900 miles to Babylon, a strange new land, where they remained for many years, grieving the loss of all that they called home.

*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.
We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.
For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.
How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?
Psalm 137:1-4 KJV*

I am moved by the sadness in this Psalm.

The people sit beside the river, mourning as they share memories of home. The drooping branches of the willow trees where they hang their instruments seem to weep along with them. The enemy taunts them, asking for joyful songs, but the people are unable to sing because they are overwhelmed with sorrow - heavy hearts make worship hard. These Israelites, these exiles, weep, not because they are being treated badly, but because of a deep, dark ache of loss and isolation.

Throughout this year, a lot of what was safe and familiar – the rhythms and routines of ‘normal’ life – have been lost. It feels like 2020 has become a season of captivity, a strange land in which I am still learning to live.

Ask

I imagine myself sitting beside a river. I ask myself: in what ways have I felt the deep, dark ache of loss? In what ways have I felt alone and isolated? Maybe I have missed physical touch and affection? Maybe I have missed the freedom to be with friends and family? In this moment of quiet, I bring all this to Father God.

Pause and pray

This season of loss and isolation has been particularly difficult for some people. I think of those who have no family, those who are utterly alone. I think of those who have lost jobs, those who have been unable to attend weddings or funerals, and especially those who have lost someone they loved to the Covid-19 virus.

I ask You, Father God, to draw close to all those who have been overwhelmed with sorrow, those who have felt paralyzed by the deep, dark ache of loss and isolation. Comfort them and care for them, I pray.

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.

*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.
We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.
For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.
How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?
Psalm 137:1-4 KJV*

Many church communities have lost their rhythms of meeting and worshiping together face-to-face. In many ways we are grieving the loss of what we called ‘home’. We’re wondering what does it mean to sing the Lord’s song in this strange landscape? Is it possible that this season of captivity could become a birthplace of new, unexpected freedom?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Heavenly Father, 2020 has been hard. Right now I’m tired, and I feel like I need to sit down. I might even cry a bit, and I’m grateful You’re OK with that. I surrender it all to You. I accept where I am right now, and how I’m feeling – thank You that you accepted where I am and how I’m feeling a long time ago.

Yielding Promise

Today, I’m grateful for the promise found in Psalm 23 that like a shepherd, You, Lord, will lead me beside still waters and there You will restore my soul. You promise to guide me, and to be with me and comfort me if (and when) the path leads through death-dark valleys. (Psalm 23:2,4)

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.*

[October 27 2020 \(click for audio\)](#)

Strange Song

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 these dark and difficult times, grant me grace to seek Your face with undiminished love. Replenish my reserves for the road is long. Surprise me in the coming day with glimpses of Your goodness, hints of your holiness, and a song of hope in this very strange land.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in the reassurance that I can depend on God, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 57:

*I will thank you, Lord, among all the people.
I will sing your praises among the nations.
For your unfailing love is as high as the heavens.
Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.
Psalm 57:9-10*

Pause and pray

Today I am continuing to reflect on Psalm 137, a Psalm of lament by a people in exile. The people of Judah have been conquered by the Babylonians. Jerusalem has been destroyed and the people have been forced to leave their homes and live in enemy territory, in the land of Babylon...

*How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.
If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not
Jerusalem above my chief joy.
Psalm 137:4-6 KJV*

The Israelites have lost their freedom, their economy, and their homes. This is a song of homesickness. It's also a song of lament for the loss of something foundational to their faith and identity; Jerusalem was home to the Temple, the primary place of connection between heaven and earth. God's presence dwelt there in a special way and the people would gather in the Temple to worship Him together.

With Jerusalem destroyed, and the Israelites captive in a strange land, how could they live as God's people and worship Him together now?

Ask

God, I bring You the changes that have made following and worshiping You a little more difficult this year. The sadness I've felt when I haven't been able to gather in person with my church community. The frustration when new rhythms and demands have interrupted my daily time with You. The feeling of distance from friends who encourage me to follow You. How can I sing Your song in my home, my

family, my community, my work and even in my rest? Help me to follow You in the strange new landscape I find myself in.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for someone I know whose faith, whose relationship with You has been shaken by grief, fear or something else in the uncertainty of this year. Reveal yourself to them today; speak words of hope, bring them comfort and renew their strength.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

*How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.
If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not
Jerusalem above my chief joy.
Psalm 137:4-6 KJV*

The exile in Babylon lasted decades. Some never saw their homeland again. I wonder, at what point did they realize that life wasn't going to go back to normal?

Some scholars suggest that the period of Babylonian exile could have been when the Jews found a new way to gather together in synagogues. Was it this ability to accept their present that helped the Israelites discover new ways to live as God's people?

In what aspects of my life and faith can I accept change and innovate in the face of uncertainty?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, normal is comfortable and familiar. It's scary to think that some things may never go back to the way they were before. I confess my fears to You. Jesus, I choose to follow you again, in the potential of this present moment.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, I trust in the promise that, 'my hope comes from God. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I shall not be shaken.' (Psalm 62:5-6)

Closing Prayer

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

[October 28 2020 \(click for audio\)](#)

Strange Rage

How shall we sing the Lord's song in [this very] strange land?' (Psalm 137:4 KJV).

Monday's Lectio was entitled 'Strange Land', yesterday's 'Strange Song', and today's prayers will explore another theme from Psalm 137: 'Strange Rage'.

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 these dark and difficult times, grant me grace to seek Your face with undiminished love. Replenish my reserves for the road is long. Surprise me in the coming day with glimpses of Your goodness, hints of your holiness, and a song of hope in this very strange land.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in the Lord today in spite of Covid-19, echoing the ancient longing of all God's people in the words of Psalm 42:

*My heart is breaking
as I remember how it used to be:
I walked among the crowds of worshipers,
leading a great procession to the house of God,
singing for joy and giving thanks
amid the sound of a great celebration!
Why am I discouraged?
Why is my heart so sad?
I will put my hope in God!
I will praise him again—
my Savior and my God!*

Psalm 42:4-5

Pause and pray|

As I return to the Psalm 137 for a third day I come to some of the most distressing words in scripture. It's tempting to skip over verses like these, but today I'm going to stop and think about one of the bitterest and most blood-thirsty bits of the entire Bible.

It's not going to be pleasant, and perhaps that's the whole point...

*By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion...
Remember, Lord, what the Edomites did
on the day Jerusalem fell.
'Tear it down,' they cried,
'tear it down to its foundations!'
Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction,*

*happy is the one who repays you
according to what you have done to us.
Happy is the one who seizes your infants
and dashes them against the rocks.
Psalm 137:1,7-9*

The violence of these verses is shocking. Its raw, unprocessed rage. The Babylonians had committed genocide, trafficked an entire nation, and massacred Jewish babies on the rocks. Now the Psalmist fantasizes about Babylonian children suffering a similar fate.

Clearly this is not the way, and these are not the words of Jesus, who commands us to love our enemies. So why have they survived the millennia? Why are they not redacted from the text?

Ask

Are my prayers ever too polished and polite? Is there a place in the way I pray for honest disappointment and even rage? Covid-19 has killed more than a million people. It has wreaked havoc in my life.

I take time now to express my frustration, anger and disappointment to the Lord.

Pause and pray

'Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour,' says the apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:8). Whatever the cause of Corona virus, it can certainly be described in similar terms: an enemy that prowls around, picking off the most vulnerable, targeting the weak.

As Jesus says of the devil, it is a 'thief [that] comes only to steal and kill and destroy.' (John 10:10a). But then he says 'I have come that they may have life to the full.' (John 10:10b)

I take time now to stand against the chaos of destruction caused by Corona virus, to say 'no more!', to declare life to the full over my family, my street, my local schools and my hospital.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to this distressing passage, I open my hands on my lap, confessing and not concealing the mess of my inner world before the Lord.

*By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion...
Remember, Lord, what the Edomites did
on the day Jerusalem fell.
'Tear it down,' they cried,
'tear it down to its foundations!'
Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction,
happy is the one who repays you
according to what you have done to us.
Happy is the one who seizes your infants
and dashes them against the rocks.
Psalm 137:1,7-9*

Some people want justice without judgment. The apostle Paul writes, 'Do not take revenge, my dear friends,' (and we all agree with that). But then he continues: 'leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.' (Romans 12:19) What on earth does it mean to 'leave room for God's wrath'?

A psycho-sexual counselor working with the survivors of incest and rape says that she finds enormous comfort in God's anger and judgment. At the end of a day hearing the most shocking stories of manifest evil, she needs to know that it won't go on forever. That God will ultimately resist, thwart and punish those who hate and hurt others in such evil ways. She finds it easier to forgive and to live at peace, because she believes that 'vengeance belongs to God.'

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Thinking now of anyone or anything that has hurt me, I yield my grievance to Your justice, God. Without denying the pain I have experienced, I choose to forgive them and ask You to forgive them too just as You have forgiven me. 'Lord... in your wrath, remember mercy.' (Hab. 3:2)

Yielding Promise

Thank you Lord that You are 'gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love... good to all' and compassionate towards all You have made. (Ps. 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.*

October 29 2020 (click for audio)

Strange Culture

When everything has changed, when normal is a distant memory, how do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

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 these dark and difficult times, grant me grace to seek Your face with undiminished love. Replenish my reserves for the road is long. Surprise me in the coming day with glimpses of Your goodness, hints of your holiness, and a song of hope in this very strange land.

Rejoice and Reflect

I rejoice today in God's protection, joining in the ancient praise 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

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the story of Daniel, a young leader forcefully deported from his native Judah to serve the King of Babylon in a culture very different from his own. How can Daniel learn to lead in a strange land?

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility... Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah...

To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.
Daniel 1:3,6,17-20

Earlier in this passage it says that Daniel and his friends were chosen for their aptitude for learning; but the writer of the book is very clear as to who is the ultimate source of their knowledge and

understanding – God alone. And to top it off, Daniel is given the bonus gifts of understanding visions and dreams! Natural gifts and supernatural gifts – both from God.

Ask

God, I ask that You would give me natural gifts to help me understand and influence the strange culture I find myself in, and to grow in my understanding of You and Your ways. God, I also ask for supernatural gifts – for dreams and visions and the ability to understand what You are saying through them. What do You want to say to me now, God?

Pause and pray

God, I pray for students who have left home to attend university. Help them with the culture shock not only of campus life, but for many of them, campus life under Covid-19 restrictions! Help them to lean into Your leadership as they learn and grow so that they can bring kingdom influence to campus culture. In the quiet I pray for specific students I know by name.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility... Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah...

To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

Daniel 1:3,6,17-20

For three years Daniel and his friends study a strange new culture. They learn the language and the literature, but they also look to God for wisdom and understanding. At the end of their studies they are heads and tails above their peers and find favor with the King. They are now uniquely positioned to bring Heaven's solutions to the challenges of a strange culture.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I yield myself to the process of preparation, to the work of learning. Help me to understand the strange culture that I find myself in, and give me discernment, strength and courage so that I can bring the influence of Your kingdom.

Yielding Promise

God I thank you that if I trust in the You with all my heart and lean not on my own understanding; if in all my ways I submit to You, You will make my paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Closing Prayer

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

October 30 2020 (click for audio)

Strange Quest

How do we sing the Lord's song in this strange new landscape?

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 these dark and difficult times, grant me grace to seek Your face with undiminished love. Replenish my reserves for the road is long. Surprise me in the coming day with glimpses of Your goodness, hints of your holiness, and a song of hope in this very strange land.

Rejoice and Reflect

I rejoice today in majesty of God's presence, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 63:

*O God, you are my God;
I earnestly search for you.
My soul thirsts for you;
my whole body longs for you
in this parched and weary land
where there is no water.
I have seen you in your sanctuary
and gazed upon your power and glory.
Your unfailing love is better than life itself;
how I praise you!
Psalm 63:1-3*

Pause and pray

Today I'm reflecting on Peter's words to the early church, who are being called to embark on a rather strange quest...

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves.

1 Peter 2:11-16

Faced with persecution and ridicule, the early Church are outsiders in the world that they find themselves in – some translations even go as far to call them 'aliens and exiles' (KJV).

As aliens and exiles, it would be easy for these early Christians to cut themselves off and retreat into cozy safety. But instead, Peter calls them to the exact opposite: to step in and to 'live among' those who are causing them harm.

The way of Jesus is not a call to cosiness, but a quest to show holiness. I am called to shine God's goodness to a dark generation (Phil 2:15). And especially this year – where many people are facing dark and scary circumstances - I can show the goodness of God.

Ask

Where am I tempted to retreat into cozy safety? What bubbles have I constructed around me which 'protect' me from those who think differently about Jesus?

Lord, help me to see the quest, or quests, that You are calling me to. Help me to step out of what I find comfortable and to show your goodness, especially to those I find challenging.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for Church communities who are living in challenging contexts – I think of the 24-7 Polylux community who are living in one of the most secular parts of Germany. I ask that people will see their good deeds and glorify 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.

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves.

1 Peter 2:11-16

'Submit yourselves...to every human authority.' These words feel even stranger when we acknowledge that our world leaders are simply human, often ignorant to God's way and His calling on their lives.

We may have personal politics and often strong opinions. Peter's challenge in this passage isn't simply about our submission, but our heart posture.

Our allegiance is always, first and foremost, to Jesus. Even when the world around us feels chaotic or uncertain, God has not relinquished control; He is still at work. And as we continue on the quest to live as aliens and strangers, He invites us to trust Him.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, as our chaotic and uncertain world spins today, I trust in You again. I posture my heart towards You and invite You to reign in me. May my life honor you.

Yielding Promise

I yield to Your promise in the Psalms that You are my strength and shield; that when I trust in You, that You help me. (Psalm 28:7)

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.

October 31 2020 (click for audio)

Strange Path

Today is also 'All Hallows Eve,' the day before All Saints Day, and it is known in many parts of the world as Halloween. Christian opinion is divided on whether dressing up and going trick-or-treating on Halloween is a harmless and fun tradition, or whether the whole event is something to be avoided at all costs. Wherever we stand today on that question, together we are going to explore themes of darkness, light and the gift of discernment.

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 these dark and difficult times, grant me grace to seek Your face with undiminished love. Replenish my reserves for the road is long. Surprise me in the coming day with glimpses of Your goodness, hints of your holiness, and a song of hope in this very strange land.

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 19...

*The commandments of the Lord are right,
bringing joy to the heart.*

*The commands of the Lord are clear,
giving insight for living.*

*Reverence for the Lord is pure,
lasting forever.*

*The laws of the Lord are true;
each one is fair.*

Psalm 19:8-9

Pause and pray

Light is used throughout Scripture as a motif for goodness, holiness, for understanding or revelation, and for God, the 'Father of Lights' (James 1:17). Darkness, on the other hand, represents fear, lack of understanding, confusion or evil. As I reflect today on the words of Isaiah, I notice the interplay of light and darkness...

*I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;*

*I will turn the darkness into light before them
and make the rough places smooth.*

These are the things I will do;

I will not forsake them.

*But those who trust in idols,
who say to images, "You are our gods,"
will be turned back in utter shame.*

Isaiah 42:16-17

Life has changed drastically this year because of the Covid-19 pandemic. At times I have felt 'blind'; not knowing what to expect next or where to go. Sometimes it's felt like I've been walking or stumbling 'along unfamiliar paths.' However, as I read Isaiah's words, I am comforted because I can trust that God will lead me, turning the darkness into light before me, and making the rough places smooth.

Ask

Where is there darkness in my life today, maybe because of fear or confusion, maybe because of uncertainty or even some form of evil?

God, I ask You to illuminate these dark places with Your light and guide my path. Show me how I can be a light bringer today.

Pause and pray

I think about someone who is going through a particularly dark time right now, for whatever reason. Jesus, light of the world, illuminate the dark places for them 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.

*I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;
I will turn the darkness into light before them
and make the rough places smooth.
These are the things I will do;
I will not forsake them.
But those who trust in idols,
who say to images, "You are our gods,"
will be turned back in utter shame.
Isaiah 42:16-17*

The Bible warns me to be on my guard and take a stand against principalities, powers and the spiritual forces of evil (Ephesians 6). It's easy to over spiritualize evil and see it around every corner, but it's equally easy to ignore the reality of the spiritual dimension that Jesus acknowledged.

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit available to all believers is 'distinguishing between spirits' (1 Corinthians 12:10).

Do I pray for and practice this gift? Do I celebrate what is good within my culture as well as challenging what is not?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, Light of the world, I yield myself to You again today. Help me to step into my calling, and the calling upon all believers, to be the light 'bringing out the God colors in the world' (Matthew 5:14, MSG)

Yielding Promise

As I think about the path ahead, I am grateful for Your promise in Matthew 28 that You, Jesus, will be 'with [me] always, to the very end of the age.' (Matthew 28:20)

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.*