

## 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***

### September 2020

<b>September 1</b>	<b>September 2</b>	<b>September 3</b>	<b>September 4</b>
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### Audio for Each Day in MP3 Format

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#### [Month of September 2020](#)

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

**September 1 2020 (click for audio)**  
Catalysts and Chameleons

This week I am celebrating the biblical call to Creativity, seeking to live with great imagination and joy as the Creator Spirit fills my life.

**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 the dust, breathe in me again. Put a new song in my heart and grant me a new imagination to perceive fresh possibilities in Your world today.*

**Rejoice and Reflect**

I invite a new song to arise in my heart today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 144...

*I will sing a new song to you, O God!  
I will sing your praises with a ten-stringed harp.  
For you grant victory to kings!  
You rescued your servant David from the fatal sword.  
Save me!  
Rescue me from the power of my enemies.  
Psalm 144:9-11a*

**Pause and pray**

As we continue to explore the creation account in Genesis 1 today, we focus today on its depiction of the creation of humanity...

*Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'  
So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.  
God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'  
Genesis 1:26-28*

What does it mean to be made 'in God's image'? There are many theories but one of the most compelling is that, like God, we share in His creativity. Some people say 'Oh, I'm not creative' just because they don't paint pictures or play a musical instrument. But to be human is to be

made in the image of a creator God who commissions each one of us to follow His example in making things, shaping the world and forming new possibilities.

### **Ask**

*Creator God, it's easy to be a bit bland and predictable, merely mirroring my environment like a chameleon. Help me to be a catalyst and not a chameleon, creating change and new possibilities. As I think about the coming day, spark my imagination. Give me one practical, positive way I can stop imitating others and start innovating with You.*

### **Pause and pray**

*Lord, I know that the first, most important way to care about creativity is to care for creation. I confess that we have exploited the world without restraint. As I pray now, show me one very practical way in which I can care for creation today, as an act of worship and intercession.*

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yield**

As I return to this familiar passage, I ask You Lord to make one particular word or phrase jump out at me in a way that is fresh and new.

*Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'*

*So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.*

*God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'*

*Genesis 1:26-28*

God says, 'Let us make mankind in our image'. Right at the start of the Bible, long before any doctrine of the Trinity has been defined, God speaks of Himself in the plural. Here, at the start of time, we find community within divinity.

And then, when God makes men and women in his image, He says that it is in our union – male and female together - that we reflect his likeness. What aspects of God's goodness are particularly revealed to me by friends who are members of the opposite sex?

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yielding Prayer**

*Holy Trinity, I yield today to Your likeness in my life. I dare to believe that somehow I look a little bit like You.*

*I am sorry for the broken relationships in my life that mar Your image. Show me if there is anyone I need to forgive, or from whom I need to seek forgiveness.*

*Father love me, Savior help me, Spirit fill me that by Your grace I may walk a little taller through this day.*

**Yielding Promise**

*I prepare myself for the many interactions of this coming day remembering that 'God places the lonely in families; he sets the prisoners free and gives them joy.' (Psalm 68:6)*

**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.***

## September 2 2020 (click for audio)

J R R Tolkien

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 Tolkien, a much-loved hero of Christian 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 the dust, breathe in me again. Put a new song in my heart and grant me a new imagination to perceive fresh possibilities in Your world today.*

#### Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to immerse myself today in the unfathomable ocean of God's greatness, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 145...

*I will exalt you, my God and King,  
and praise your name forever and ever.  
I will praise you every day;  
yes, I will praise you forever.  
Great is the Lord! He is most worthy of praise!  
No one can measure his greatness.  
Psalm 145:1-3*

### Pause and pray

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was a polymath Oxford professor, an expert in Anglo Saxon mythology and one of the most influential writers of the last century, best-known for his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Recognized as the father of the modern fantasy genre of literature, and as the man who led his friend C.S. Lewis to the Lord, Tolkien's Christian worldview continues to shape the cultural landscape, affecting countless lives today.

'The chief purpose of life, for any one of us,' he once wrote, 'is to increase according to our capacity our knowledge of God by all the means we have, and to be moved by it to praise and thanks.'\*

\*Jim Ware, *Finding God in the Hobbits* p22

Tolkien believed that, within every person and indeed within the stories of every culture, there are the fingerprints of God waiting to be revealed:

'We have come from God, and inevitably the myths woven by us, though they contain error, will also reflect a splintered fragment of the true light, the eternal truth that is with God. Indeed only by myth-making, only by becoming 'sub-creator' and inventing stories, can Man aspire to

the state of perfection that he knew before the Fall. Our myths may be misguided, but they steer however shakily towards the true harbor...' \*\*

The ultimate example of the power of such storytelling is not Tolkien but Jesus. On one occasion we are told by Matthew: 'All Jesus did that day was tell stories—a long storytelling afternoon. His storytelling fulfilled the prophecy: I will open my mouth and tell stories; I will bring out into the open things hidden since the world's first day.' (Matthew 13:34-35 MSG)

\*\**Humphrey Carpenter, J R R Tolkien: A Biography (1977) p66*

### **Ask**

What opportunities do I have to participate in creative acts of storytelling? Is there a novel the Lord is asking me to read? A bedtime story I might create for a child? A movie that the Spirit wants me to watch in order to speak to me in some new way?

### **Pause and pray**

Who is my C.S. Lewis? Who is that person known to me whose gifts could influence the culture for God's glory if only they came to know Him? I pray for an opportunity to have a really interesting and provocative conversation with them soon.

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yield**

Recent months have been brutally challenging for many. The words of Tolkien's hobbit Frodo to the wizard Gandalf surely resonate with us all:

"I wish it need not have happened in my time," said Frodo. "So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."\*\*\*

\*\*\**J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring*

Are there unhappy circumstances in my own life which I need to stop fighting and start accepting? What opportunities are there for me to serve God this month, here and now within the constraints of my predicament?

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yielding Prayer**

*Creator God, thank You that You are writing a story of great adventure with my little life. I yield to the challenges, the shadows and even the necessary pain, trusting You to bring me home eventually to the shire with a song to sing and a story to tell.*

### **Yielding Promise**

*I yield to You today, Lord, fixing my eyes on You once again and trusting You as both the author of my unfolding story, and the perfecter of my imperfect faith. (Hebrews 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.*

[September 3 2020 \(click for audio\)](#)

### Beautiful Me

This week I am celebrating the biblical call to Creativity, seeking to live with great imagination and joy as the Creator Spirit fills my life.

#### 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 the dust, breathe in me again. Put a new song in my heart and grant me a new imagination to perceive fresh possibilities in Your world today.*

#### Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's 'awe-inspiring deeds', joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 145...

*I will meditate on your majestic, glorious splendor  
and your wonderful miracles.  
Your awe-inspiring deeds will be on every tongue;  
I will proclaim your greatness.  
Everyone will share the story of your wonderful goodness;  
they will sing with joy about your righteousness.*

*Psalm 145:5-7*

#### Pause and pray

Today's reflection on creativity is short but loaded with meaning, coming, as it does, from a single Bible verse. This is a moment of supreme satisfaction and celebration as God completes his work of creation...

*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day.*

*Genesis 1:31*

I just love the idea of God stepping back like an artist from a canvas, to survey all that He's created and saying, with a sense of deep joy, 'It's good. It's very good.' The Hebrew word translated here as 'good' can also mean *beautiful*. So I may also say that God surveys the mountains and stars, the subatomic realm, the ocean depths and then He looks at me, and says 'Wow! You're beautiful. You're *very* beautiful.'

#### Ask

1600 years ago Augustine of Hippo observed that: 'People travel to wonder at the height of the mountains, at the huge waves of the seas, at the long course of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars, and yet they pass by themselves without wondering.'

*Lord, I don't exactly stare in the mirror thinking 'Wow, how beautiful!' But this passage says that You look at me with undisguised affection and even admiration, saying the most surprising thing: 'I'm pleased with you! I did a good job with you. You are very beautiful.' Help me today to remember that You are smiling not scowling, taking great delight in me.*

### **Pause and pray**

*Lord, would You open my eyes to see others the way You see them today? As I think about the difficult people I may encounter, give me the grace to discover the positive intentions behind their negative actions and words. Lend me the kind of love that calls a little beauty out of each person You bring across my path 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.

*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day.*

*Genesis 1:31*

Amidst the busyness of life, and the relentless challenges I face, God reminds me here to step back at least once a week, to simply admire and enjoy what I have made. Perhaps sometimes I will be able to say 'it's good' - and occasionally even 'it's very good' - as an act of worship.

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yielding Prayer**

*Lord I yield to you the works of my hands. I give you all the glory for these things, large and small, which I get to co-create with you. I offer them to you like a little kid offering a painting to his mum. Thank you that you don't require me to be Rembrandt. You admire my best efforts, appreciate the work of my hands (when others don't) and value my creativity saying 'Wow! It's very beautiful.'*

### **Yielding Promise**

*Lord, thank You that your Word says that You have crowned us with glory and honor (Psalm 8:5). I step into the coming day trusting in this truth that You, my Creator, delight in me.*

### **Closing Prayer**

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

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

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

***Amen.***

[September 4 2029 \(click for audio\)](#)

The Heat of Our Desire

**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 the dust, breathe in me again. Put a new song in my heart and grant me a new imagination to perceive fresh possibilities in Your world today.*

**Rejoice and Reflect**

I choose to rejoice today in God's tenderness towards all that he has so carefully created, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 145...

*The Lord is merciful and compassionate,  
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.  
The Lord is good to everyone.  
He showers compassion on all his creation.  
All of your works will thank you, Lord,  
and your faithful followers will praise you.*

*Psalm 145:8-10*

**Pause and pray**

Today's reading concludes the biblical cycle of creation in Genesis 2, introducing the important idea of Sabbath rest as a culmination and celebration of all that God has made.

*Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

*Genesis 2:1-3*

The Trappist monk Thomas Merton once said that 'The major spiritual disease in the Western world is efficiency because from the government offices down to the nursery we have to keep the plant running and, afterwards, we've no energy left for anything else.'\*

God rested from His creative endeavors and so must I. He did not make me a machine. My best, kindest and most creative self needs space to breathe and a little waste of time. So why do I find it so hard to rest? What is it that drives me so relentlessly to work so hard?

\*Thomas Merton, *The Modern Cult of Efficiency* (Credence Cassettes, 1994)

**Ask**

On one occasion, when Jesus and his disciples were so busy that they didn't even have time to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.' (Mark 6:31)

*Lord, I accept this invitation! I am here now in this quiet place with You.*

### **Pause and pray**

*I turn my thoughts now to friends and family members who seem exhausted - perhaps because they are overworked, overstretched or overwhelmed by life. I name them before You Lord now, one at a time, asking You to restore their souls with real rest.*

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yield**

As I return to the passage, I notice the sense of completion and celebration that comes with the Seventh Day...

*Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

*Genesis 2:1-3*

John Greenleaf Whittier was an 18th century American poet who spent most of his life fighting for the abolition of slavery. It was a great and urgent cause that must at times have seemed all-consuming. Perhaps that's why one of his most famous poems asks God for the gift of rest. I pray these words with him now, yielding to God's grace and pace for my life....

### **Yielding Prayer**

*Drop Thy Still Dews of Quietness,  
Til all our strivings cease.  
Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
and let our ordered lives confess,  
the beauty of thy peace.  
Breathe through the heat of our desire  
your coolness and your balm;  
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire,  
speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,  
O still small voice of calm.*

### **Yielding Promise**

*Thank you Jesus, today, for the comforting words you shared:  
'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'* (Matthew 11:28-30)

### **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.*

[September 5 2020 \(click for audio\)](#)

Happy Birthday 24/7

On this day 21 years ago we launched the very first 24-7 Prayer Room. And so, on this the 21st birthday of the 24-7 Prayer movement we are going to remember what God has done and give thanks.

#### **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**

*Loving Father, thank You for your extraordinary faithfulness over so many years. You have never left nor forsaken me. You have been true to all your promises. You have done immeasurably more than I could ever have asked or imagined. You are my Rock, my Foundation, my Fortress and my Friend.*

#### **Rejoice and Reflect**

I choose to rejoice today in the wonderful things God has done, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 40...

*Oh, the joys of those who trust the Lord,  
who have no confidence in the proud  
or in those who worship idols.  
O Lord my God, you have performed many wonders for us.  
Your plans for us are too numerous to list.  
You have no equal.  
If I tried to recite all your wonderful deeds,  
I would never come to the end of them.  
Psalm 40:4-5*

#### **Pause and pray**

#### **Reflect**

In the first prayer room 21 years ago someone graffitied today's reading on the wall. These verses, more than any other, helped make sense of the thing that God was doing in us and through us as we prayed. This is Isaiah 62...

*For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,  
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,  
her salvation like a blazing torch...  
I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem;  
they will never be silent day or night.*

*You who call on the Lord,  
give yourselves no rest,  
and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem  
and makes her the praise of the earth.*

*Isaiah 62:1,6-7*

We weren't trying to start a movement. We were just a bunch of students, terrible at prayer, hoping to learn how to do it. Much to our surprise, word began to spread, and our night-and-day prayer vigil went viral.

Today the 24-7 movement has reached more than half the nations on earth, catalyzing many new ministries, communities and resources including this app, Lectio 365.

God seems to be fulfilling this scripture in our time, posting watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem who will give themselves 'no rest, and give him no rest' until He revives the fortune of Zion.

### **Ask**

*I ask you Lord to renew in me an all-consuming zeal for Zion, a burning passion for Your people and an absolute determination to see Your Church restored and revived in our time.*

### **Pause and pray**

*I cry out to You now, Lord, asking that You would revive Your church and rewire the culture, using the words of the prophet Habakkuk: 'I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.'* (Habakkuk 3:2)

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yield**

As I return to the passage, I envisage the fortified walls of Jerusalem. I see its watchmen awake while the city sleeps. I feel the cold and hear them crying out through the watches of the night...

*For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,  
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,  
her salvation like a blazing torch...  
  
I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem;  
they will never be silent day or night.  
  
You who call on the Lord,  
give yourselves no rest,  
and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem  
and makes her the praise of the earth.*

*Isaiah 62:1,6-7*

Isaiah is so passionate about the city of God that he cannot rest until her fortunes are restored. I meet so many people who want to change the Church merely because they are frustrated and disillusioned with her.

But before we can change the Church we must love her enough to lament for her as she is. To be a watchman is to cry out for the people we love and the streets where we live. It is also to keep watch for the first sign of an enemy attack or an approaching messenger. I ask the Holy Spirit to alert me – to open my eyes to see the spiritual battles raging around the Church at this time.

### **Pause and pray**

#### **Yielding Prayer**

*I say yes to You once again today Lord, trusting in your faithfulness and love. Yes to Your will for my life even when it isn't my preference. Yes to Your purposes, even when I can't understand them. And yes to the pace of Your purposes, even when it seems too slow.*

#### **Yielding Promise**

'Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.' (Ephesians 3:20-21)

#### **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.*

**September 6 2020 (click for audio)**  
A Sabbath Prayer for Creativity

This week we've been exploring the story of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, but today we pause as God Himself paused, to practice sabbath rest.

**Pause and pray**

I make the words of Psalm 23 my prayer today...

*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.*  
Psalm 23:1-3

**Pause and pray**

Sabbath,' writes John Koessler, 'affords a rest by which we are not so much restored as re-storied.\* 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*, p106

*Father, would You re-story us today. We 'stand at the crossroads' and 'ask for the ancient paths'* (Jer. 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, we pray, a new imagination. 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 dead religion. 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 locally. 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.\**

\*\*Sabbath Blessing by Pete Greig, [petegreig.info](http://petegreig.info)

**September 7 2020 (click for audio)**  
Listen, Weep, and Pray

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 who speaks. The earth came alive at the sound of Your voice. Would You speak to me and make me come alive? Jesus, You alone have the words of eternal life. Holy Spirit, would You intercede for me in my weakness and teach me how to pray?*

**Rejoice and Reflect**

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

*Praise the Lord!*

*Let all that I am praise the Lord.*

*I will praise the Lord as long as I live.*

*I will sing praises to my God with my dying breath.*

*Psalm 146:1-2*

**Pause and pray**

I am spending this week in the book of Nehemiah. The author is in a position of influence in the Persian court. His people, Israel, have been in exile but some have made their way back to a ruined Jerusalem. I join Nehemiah at the beginning of a physical and spiritual journey.

*The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah:*

*In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.*

*They said to me, 'Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.'*

*When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.*

*Nehemiah 1:1-4*

When Nehemiah hears reports of Jerusalem, the first thing he does is he asks questions and listens to the answers. The second thing Nehemiah does is mourn. He engages his heart in the suffering of others. He weeps, he fasts and he prays.

**Ask**

Am I too quick to judge situations? Do I ask good questions and take time to listen to the answers? Or do I jump to conclusions and assume that I know what is right and best? I think of a difficult situation that has come to my attention recently.

God, I ask that You would give me a listening ear and a humble and compassionate heart.

### **Pause and pray**

God, I pray for those whose lives are broken down, for those who are in great trouble and disgrace. Would You help me to empathize, to join them in their sorrow and to carry their burdens with them as I pray for them now.

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yield**

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

*The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah:*

*In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.*

*They said to me, 'Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.'*

*When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.*

*Nehemiah 1:1-4*

Nehemiah doesn't offer up a token prayer in response to the reports of trouble. How many times have I shot off a thirty second prayer in the face of great challenge, just so I can get on with my day? Nehemiah spends *several* days mourning, fasting and praying. How willing am I to sacrificially lay aside my schedule, to labor in prayer, and to battle on behalf of others?

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yielding Prayer**

*God I give You my schedule. Would You make my life a prayer, an offering to you? When challenge comes, may I weep with those who weep and stand before You, God of Heaven, on their behalf*

### **Yielding Promise**

*Thank You Lord for your promise in Matthew 7: 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.' (Matt. 7:7-8)*

### **Closing Prayer**

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

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

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

*Amen.*

**September 8 2020 (click for audio)**  
[What Do You Magnify?](#)

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 Prayer. ‘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 who speaks. The earth came alive at the sound of Your voice. Would You speak to me and make me come alive? Jesus, You alone have the words of eternal life. Holy Spirit, would You intercede for me in my weakness and teach me how to pray?*

**Rejoice and Reflect**

I choose to rejoice today in God's intimate care, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 147...

*Praise the Lord!  
How good to sing praises to our God!  
How delightful and how fitting...  
He heals the brokenhearted  
and bandages their wounds.  
He counts the stars  
and calls them all by name.  
How great is our Lord! His power is absolute!  
His understanding is beyond comprehension!*  
Psalm 147:1,3-5

**Pause and pray**

Today I return to the story of Nehemiah. He has heard a terrible report of the desolation of Jerusalem and sets aside several days to mourn, to fast and to pray. I reflect now on the first part of his prayer.

*Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel...*

*Nehemiah 1:5-6a*

I was once mentored by a feisty Messianic Jew. ‘Whatever you magnify,’ he exhorted, ‘gets bigger in your eyes. You can magnify your problem. Or you can magnify the Lord. Which do you choose?’ Nehemiah, faced with a disaster, is utterly realistic about the scale of the problem, but begins his prayer by focusing first on the greatness of God.

**Ask**

What problems am I facing today? Am I spending more time magnifying the problem or magnifying the Lord?

*God, today I choose to glorify You. I consider Your greatness. You are awesome in all of Your deeds. You are the God who keeps His covenant of love.*

#### **Pause and pray**

When I look at my town or city, how do I feel about the problems we are facing? Do they sometimes seem bigger than God? I declare the greatness of God and the hope of the gospel now, as I name particular areas of brokenness in society.

#### **Pause and pray**

#### **Yield**

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

*Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel...*

*Nehemiah 1:5-6a*

Nehemiah says that he is praying day and night. One of the wonderful discoveries we've made in the 24-7 Prayer movement is the power of praying persistently, even at night.

How many times have I woken in the night worrying about something? Can I turn that time of worry into a time of prayer?

#### **Pause and pray**

#### **Yielding Prayer**

*Lord, sometimes my problems and the problems of the world seem to overwhelm me. Thank You that you are greater than every problem I face, and today I yield myself to Your sovereignty in all circumstances.*

#### **Yielding Promise**

*Thank You, Lord, for Your promise to hear our prayer in the book of Luke, 'And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.' (Lk 18:7-8)*

#### **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.*

**September 9 2020 (click for audio)**  
Whose Sin?

**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 who speaks. The earth came alive at the sound of Your voice. Would You speak to me and make me come alive? Jesus, You alone have the words of eternal life. Holy Spirit, would You intercede for me in my weakness and teach me how to pray?*

**Rejoice and Reflect**

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

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

*Psalm 5:11-12*

**Pause and pray**

Yesterday Nehemiah got bad news about the Jewish exiles in Jerusalem. As he responded to the news with prayer he focused on the greatness of God, and entreated God to hear his petition. Today, the next part of his prayer takes an unexpected turn.

*I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly towards you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.*

*Nehemiah 1:6b-7*

Nehemiah's prayer seems peculiar. He confesses his own sin, the sin of his family, and even the sin of generations who have gone before him. What's with that? This may seem peculiar when viewed through our western individualistic mindset, but in a culture shaped more around community, this type of identificational repentance makes sense. I am part of you, you are part of me. Your pain is my pain. Your sin is my sin. We're in it together.

**Ask**

*God, I ask You to show me how I may be complicit in the sins of those around me or even the iniquity of my culture at large. Through my shopping habits am I supporting sweatshops and child labor? In keeping silent on critical issues, do I allow injustice to have its way? In the quiet, would you open my eyes to the bigger picture and my part in it?*

**Pause and pray**

What are the sins of my nation? Of my generation?

*God, I confess these sins before You. We have not obeyed your commands. Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Teach us to honor 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.

*I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly towards you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.*

*Nehemiah 1:6b-7*

Nehemiah is clear. When he sins against others, he is sinning against God. In Matthew 25, Jesus makes it clear that what we do for others we do for Him and when we don't care for others, we neglect Him as well.

#### **Pause and pray**

##### **Yielding Prayer**

*God, I have been desensitized to sin, to the effects of my actions or inactions, and to the harm I have done to others, and ultimately to You. I yield to Your conviction and I ask for Your forgiveness. Cleanse me O God, and I will be clean.*

##### **Yielding Promise**

*God, I thank you for Your promise that, 'If we confess our sins, [You are] faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)*

##### **Closing Prayer**

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

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

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

*Amen.*

## September 10 2020 (click for audio)

### Promises In Exile

#### 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 who speaks. The earth came alive at the sound of Your voice. Would You speak to me and make me come alive? Jesus, You alone have the words of eternal life. Holy Spirit, would You intercede for me in my weakness and teach me how to pray?*

#### 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 8...

*O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!  
Your glory is higher than the heavens.  
You have taught children and infants  
to tell of your strength,  
silencing your enemies  
and all who oppose you.*

*Psalm 8:1-2*

#### Pause and pray

We are halfway through Nehemiah's prayer of intercession for Israel and the broken down ruins of Jerusalem. He has glorified God. He has repented for his sins and the sins of his nation. Now he reminds God of His promises.

*'Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, "If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name."*

*'They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.'*

*I was cupbearer to the king.*

*Nehemiah 1:8-11*

Nehemian reminds God of his promise to Israel. Has God ever made me a promise? The Bible is full of them:

Never will I leave you, nor will I forsake you (Hebrews 13:5).

Though you walk through the fire, you will not be burned (Isaiah 43:2).

Trust in the Lord with all your heart... and he will direct your paths (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Which of God's promises feel particularly relevant or alive to me today? Which ones am I hanging on to for dear life?

#### Ask

*God, I trust in your unfailing love and believe that you will keep your promises to me. In the quiet I bring these specific promises to you again, and like Nehemiah, I ask You to fulfill them.*

**Pause and pray**

*God, I pray for those who feel scattered, for those who feel exiled. Maybe from their families or from their friends. Maybe those who are refugees and immigrants, exiled from their homeland. Gather them to the place you have chosen and prepared 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.

*'Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, "If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name."*

*'They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.'*

*I was cupbearer to the king.*

*Nehemiah 1:8-11*

Nehemiah asks that God would grant him favor. He's about to ask the King if he can go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. It's an audacious request and there is no good reason why the King should grant it. However, in Proverbs it says that "In the Lord's hand the king's heart is a stream of water that he channels toward all who please him." (Proverbs 21:1)

With the favor of the Lord on his side, Nehemiah can accomplish anything - so it is God's favor that he asks for.

**Pause and pray**

**Yielding Prayer**

*Father, I believe in you and your promises. I give myself to you and to your purposes. Would you surround me with your favor so that through me you can accomplish all that you desire?*

**Yielding Promise**

*I take seriously your promise in Proverbs 3 that if I, 'Trust in [You] with all [my] heart... [You] will direct [my] paths (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.*

## September 11 2020 (click for audio)

### Rest As A Weapon

#### 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 who speaks. The earth came alive at the sound of Your voice. Would You speak to me and make me come alive? Jesus, You alone have the words of eternal life. Holy Spirit, would You intercede for me in my weakness and teach me how to pray?*

#### Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's splendor, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 149...

*Praise the Lord!*

*Sing to the Lord a new song.*

*Sing his praises in the assembly of the faithful.*

*Psalm 149:1*

#### Pause and pray

Nehemiah has been sent by the king to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. I join him now on the next part of his journey.

*I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.*

*By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire.*

*Nehemiah 2:11-13*

What does Nehemiah do when he first arrives in Jerusalem? Nothing! He stops and he rests. If it were me, I would have unpacked my bags, rolled up my sleeves, and got right to work! Nehemiah's strategy seems counter intuitive to getting the job done. Actually it makes good sense, as he was at the end of an arduous journey and there is still much more to do.

#### Ask

God it's so tempting in the face of great need to jump right into action. Please help me to stop when I need to. To rest when I need to. To listen when I need to. To relinquish the myth of my indispensability and to create more space for You to work. Right now, in the quiet, I simply rest.

#### Pause and pray

Father, I pray for someone who I know who is carrying an immense burden or facing a daunting situation. Would You surprise them today with a moment of stillness and rest?

#### 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 went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.*

*By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire.*

*Nehemiah 2:11-13*

After Nehemiah rests, he goes out to assess the situation. I need to do both. Firstly, by resting I exercise trust in God. Secondly, by assessing the situation objectively I can formulate a prayer strategy. If I'm honest, I often skip these steps, trying to solve the problem in my own strength.

## **Pause and pray**

### **Yielding Prayer**

*God, You have what it takes for my situation. You know exactly what the problems are, and You have in mind the best situation. You are far wiser than me. I yield myself to Your strength and to Your wisdom today.*

### **Yielding Promise**

*Thank You, God, for Your promise to help me as I rest,*

*'He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.  
Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;  
but those who hope in the Lord  
will renew their strength.*

*They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.'*

*(Isa. 40:29-31)*

### **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.*

**September 12 2020 (click for audio)**  
Facing Opposition

**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 who speaks. The earth came alive at the sound of Your voice. Would You speak to me and make me come alive? Jesus, You alone have the words of eternal life. Holy Spirit, would You intercede for me in my weakness and teach me how to pray?*

**Rejoice and Reflect**

I choose to rejoice today in God's might and greatness, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 150...

*Praise the Lord!  
Praise God in his sanctuary;  
    praise him in his mighty heaven!  
Praise him for his mighty works;  
    praise his unequaled greatness!  
Let everything that breathes sing praises to the Lord!  
Praise the Lord!  
Psalm 150:1,2-6*

**Pause and pray**

Nehemiah and the people of the city begin to rebuild the wall, but their work does not go unopposed. Local authorities who were threatened by the work begin to mock them...

*When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews...  
"Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders"  
So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.*

*Nehemiah 4: 1,4-6*

Jesus said, 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.' (Matthew 5:11). Often when I do the work of God, I face criticism, mockery, or worse! I hate it when people don't like me! It's so painful! Nehemiah does not directly react to his accusers and abusers. Instead he goes straight to God with an angry, honest prayer.

**Ask**

Are there people who don't like me, who are set against me? Am I experiencing opposition or criticism right now? Am I feeling frustrated and angry? *God, in the quiet I give You my honest prayer - my disappointment, my anger, my frustration and my fear.*

**Pause and pray**

*God, I pray for those in my life who I know are facing opposition, and especially those who are losing heart and courage. Encourage them. Strengthen feeble knees and weak hands. When they are faced by an enemy may they turn their faces to You. Help them to pour out their hearts to You, full of confidence that You hear and will help. I name them before you now.*

#### **Pause and pray**

#### **Yield**

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

*When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews...*

*Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.*

*So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.*

*Nehemiah 4: 1-4-6*

In the school of prayer with Nehemiah, I can learn as much from his weaknesses as I can from his strengths. In his frustration, Nehemiah returns curse for curse. However, Jesus teaches us to return blessing for a curse, and to pray for those who persecute us.

#### **Pause and pray**

#### **Yielding Prayer**

*God, it's tempting to react with anger when someone stands in my way, actively opposes me, or is critical and mocking. God, I yield my angry and bruised heart to You and ask that You would give me a new heart, a new spirit, and the capacity to bless those who curse me.*

#### **Yielding Promise**

I yield to Your promise of help as I practice compassion and grace,

*'I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.'*

*Ezekiel 11:19*

#### **Closing Prayer**

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

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

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

*Amen.*

## September 13 2020 (click for audio)

### A Sabbath Prayer

Eugene Peterson describes Sabbath as 'a time to receive silence and let it deepen into gratitude'. \*  
And so, on this day of rest, as I prepare to pray, I settle into silence and allow thankfulness to bubble up inside.

\*Eugene Peterson, *Tell it Slant*, p.82

#### **Pause and pray**

A prayer of contentment from Psalm 131:

'My heart is not proud, Lord,  
my eyes are not haughty;  
I do not concern myself with great matters  
or things too wonderful for me.  
But I have calmed and quietened myself,  
I am like a weaned child with its mother;  
like a weaned child I am content.  
Israel, put your hope in the Lord  
both now and for evermore.'

In the silence of this moment, I express my deep gratitude for the Church:  
Father, thank You for Your beautiful, multicultural, inter generational family, gathering today in  
so many countries. Revive and sanctify us, I pray. Make us a house of prayer for all nations. And  
set our hearts on fire again with the good news of Your gospel.

I take a moment now to earth these big prayers locally by naming members of my own church, and  
friends who are finding life particularly tough.

#### **Pause and pray**

I dedicate the coming week to Jesus:

Thank You, Father, for loving me with all Your heart, all Your soul and all Your mind.

Inspire me this week to love You more with all of mine.

Thank You, Jesus, for Your faithful and sacrificial friendship.

Help me this week to be a faithful and sacrificial friend like You.

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for listening to my many thoughts and words and dreams.

Still my soul this week to listen much more carefully to Yours.

#### **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](http://petegreig.info)

**September 14 2020 (click for audio)**  
***Scarlet and Snow***

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**

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

**Rejoice and Reflect**

I choose to rejoice today in God's protection, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 3...

*But you, O Lord, are a shield around me;  
you are my glory, the one who holds my head high.  
I cried out to the Lord,  
and he answered me from his holy mountain.  
Psalm 3:3-4*

**Pause and pray**

Today's reading is deeply disturbing. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God is challenging his people to repent and pursue justice for the poor...

*When you spread out your hands in prayer,  
I hide my eyes from you;  
even when you offer many prayers,  
I am not listening.  
Your hands are full of blood!  
Wash and make yourselves clean.  
Take your evil deeds out of my sight;  
stop doing wrong.  
Learn to do right; seek justice.  
Defend the oppressed.  
Take up the cause of the fatherless;  
plead the case of the widow.  
Come now, let us settle the matter,'  
says the Lord.  
'Though your sins are like scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red as crimson,  
they shall be like wool.  
Isaiah 1:15-18*

This last sentence, verse 18, is often quoted out of context. God's promise to make our scarlet sins as white as snow relates quite specifically to the blood-guilt of social injustice. It's not just about personal piety. It's about the fundamental attitude of society towards its most vulnerable members. The 'fatherless' and 'the widow' is shorthand for those who are vulnerable economically and marginalized culturally so perhaps we might add refugees, single parents, ethnic minorities, the unemployed, the elderly, or those with disabilities.

### Ask

Thinking now of someone - or some group of people - who are silenced or ignored in society, I ask You, Lord, to help me to use my voice on their behalf. Make me an advocate for the misunderstood, the marginalized and the voiceless.

### Pause and pray

Lord, I am sorry that our society is so cruel and uncaring towards those who are vulnerable. Our sins of selfishness and injustice are like scarlet before You.

I name before You now those people I know who spend their lives advocating for the poor and giving a voice to the voiceless – civil rights activists, social workers, teachers, politicians, pastors, human rights lawyers and charity workers.

### Pause and pray

### Yield

As I return to the passage, I notice how it links unanswered prayer with my attitude towards the poor...

*When you spread out your hands in prayer,  
I hide my eyes from you;  
even when you offer many prayers,  
I am not listening.  
Your hands are full of blood!  
Wash and make yourselves clean.  
Take your evil deeds out of my sight;  
stop doing wrong.  
Learn to do right; seek justice.  
Defend the oppressed.  
Take up the cause of the fatherless;  
plead the case of the widow.  
Come now, let us settle the matter,'  
says the Lord.  
'Though your sins are like scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red as crimson,  
they shall be like wool.*  
*Isaiah 1:15-18*

These words are deeply challenging but they are also deeply reassuring – God promises to forgive me if I will just turn away from injustice. 'Though [my] sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.'

On the cross Jesus activated this promise: becoming the victim of the gravest injustice in human history that I might be forgiven.

No matter what I have done there is always more grace in God than shame in me. 'If we confess our sins,' says the apostle John, '[God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.' (1 John 1:9)

### **Pause and pray**

#### **Yielding Prayer**

*Lord I confess that I live in an unjust society and I myself can often be faithless and unfair. I surrender my self-righteousness, and instead I seek first your righteousness today.*

#### **Yielding Promise**

*Thank you for the promise in John's first letter, that you are relentlessly 'faithful and just'. You 'forgive [me my] sins and cleanse [me] from all unrighteousness.' (1 John 1:9)*

#### **Closing Prayer**

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

**September 15 2020 (click for audio)**  
***Houd Vast***

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 justice. ‘A’: ASKING God to help us live more justly, 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**

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

**Rejoice and Reflect**

I choose to rejoice today in God's presence, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 5...

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

*Psalm 5:11-12*

**Pause and pray**

This week I am reflecting on what the book of Isaiah says about justice. It is a book of prophecy, mostly written to and for the people of Israel. It isn't chronological, and it isn't always straight-forward. It leaps and loops around, revisiting particular themes over and over again. Some of it requires serious study in order to understand. Other parts, however, seem uncomfortably clear....

*This is what the Lord says:  
'Maintain justice  
and do what is right,  
for my salvation is close at hand  
and my righteousness will soon be revealed.  
Blessed is the one who does this –  
the person who holds it fast,  
who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it,  
and keeps their hands from doing any evil.'  
Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say,  
'The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.'  
And let no eunuch complain,  
'I am only a dry tree.'  
For this is what the Lord says:  
'To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,*

*who choose what pleases me  
and hold fast to my covenant –  
to them I will give within my temple and its walls  
a memorial and a name  
better than sons and daughters;  
I will give them an everlasting name  
that will endure for ever.*

*Isaiah 56:1-5*

In 'The Message' version of the Bible, Eugene Peterson paraphrases the second half of this passage like this:

'Make sure no outsider who now follows God ever has occasion to say, "God put me in second-class. I don't really belong." And make sure no physically mutilated person is ever made to think, "I'm damaged goods. I don't really belong.'" (Isaiah 56:3, MSG)

Many people feel like they 'don't really belong' in church. Maybe because of something they've done, or something that has been done to them. Isaiah is clear, however, that no-one who follows God should ever feel like an outsider. Everyone is welcome. Everyone belongs.

### **Ask**

Is there something that I have done, something that I have experienced, or something about who I am, that makes me feel like I don't really belong in God's family?

*Father, You know the details, but I offer it all to You anyway. I ask You to help me to fully receive the warm welcome of belonging with You today.*

### **Pause and pray**

*I pray for those in my church community who feel like they are 'damaged goods' in some way. I ask You Father to draw especially close to them, and I echo Isaiah's words, that they may receive a blessing 'better than sons and daughters'.*

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yield**

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

*This is what the Lord says:  
'Maintain justice  
and do what is right,  
for my salvation is close at hand  
and my righteousness will soon be revealed.  
Blessed is the one who does this –  
the person who holds it fast,  
who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it,  
and keeps their hands from doing any evil.'  
Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say,  
'The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.'  
And let no eunuch complain,  
'I am only a dry tree.'  
For this is what the Lord says:  
'To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,*

*who choose what pleases me  
and hold fast to my covenant –  
to them I will give within my temple and its walls  
a memorial and a name  
better than sons and daughters;  
I will give them an everlasting name  
that will endure for ever.*

*Isaiah 56:1-5*

The English phrase, 'hold fast' is a nautical term. It comes from the Dutch, *houd vast*, meaning 'hold tight', and it refers to a ship's rigging being securely tied down.

When Isaiah wrote these words in his own language, it's unlikely that he had a ship's rigging in mind. However, it is likely that he meant what this imagery implies. When times are tough, I need to hold fast and stay the course. I need to continue to live right, to act justly. The Lord's salvation is close at hand, maybe closer than I think.

### **Pause and pray**

#### **Yielding Prayer**

*Father, help me to hold fast, to stay the course, to not give up. Honestly, I sometimes wish that You would answer my prayers more quickly, but I yield to Your timing. I trust that Your salvation is close at hand.*

#### **Yielding Promise**

*Using the words of Psalm 27, I choose to wait for You, Lord. Help me to be strong and whole-hearted, and to wait for You, Lord. (Psalm 27:14)*

#### **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.*

**September 16 2020 (click for audio)**  
***I Will Gather Still Others***

**Pause**

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

**Pause and pray**

**Prayer of Approach**

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

**Rejoice and Reflect**

I choose to rejoice today in God's saving power, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 7...

*God is my shield,  
saving those whose hearts are true and right...  
I will thank the Lord because he is just;  
I will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High.  
Psalm 7:10,17*

**Pause and pray**

Today, I continue to reflect on the prophet Isaiah's call to the people of Israel to pursue justice by including others. God's justice, it seems, is hospitable, and His devout intent is to gather people to Himself.

*And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord  
to minister to him,  
to love the name of the Lord,  
and to be his servants,  
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it  
and who hold fast to my covenant—  
these I will bring to my holy mountain  
and give them joy in my house of prayer.  
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house will be called  
a house of prayer for all nations."  
The Sovereign Lord declares—  
he who gathers the exiles of Israel:  
"I will gather still others to them  
besides those already gathered."  
Isaiah 56:6-8*

In Psalm 43, David asks God, 'bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.' (Psalm 43:3).

Here in today's passage, Isaiah says that God will do the same thing for both refugees and exiles, for those on the outside and those who have been on the inside, for those who have been trying to serve God, but who aren't sure if He truly accepts and includes them.

'These I will bring to my holy mountain,' says the Lord, 'and give them joy in my house of prayer.'

### **Ask**

Is there someone I know who is trying to live right, to serve God in their own way, but who finds it hard to believe that God truly accepts and includes them?

*I ask You Lord to go after them. Show them how You love them today, in a really practical way. I ask You to gather them to your holy mountain, into Your family.*

### **Pause and pray**

I think about the churches, the different groups of Christians who make up the body of Christ in my local area.

*I ask You God to show us what it means to become a living house of prayer together, where people encounter You and grow to know You. Make us one.*

### **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 foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord  
to minister to him,  
to love the name of the Lord,  
and to be his servants,  
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it  
and who hold fast to my covenant—  
these I will bring to my holy mountain  
and give them joy in my house of prayer.  
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house will be called  
a house of prayer for all nations.”  
The Sovereign Lord declares—  
he who gathers the exiles of Israel:  
“I will gather still others to them  
besides those already gathered.”*

*Isaiah 56:6-8*

As I reflect on this chapter, on the ministry of Jesus, and on the stories of God's interaction with people throughout the Bible, it's clear that the story of God is one of inclusion.

‘I will gather the exiles of Israel,’ says the Lord. And ‘I will gather *still others* to them...’

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yielding Prayer**

*Thank You Father for sending Jesus to seek and save the exiles, the refugees, the others besides them... and thank You for saving me too. I am grateful that Your justice looks like hospitality, and I yield to Your justice and mercy in my life today.*

### **Yielding Promise**

*I praise You, Lord, for Your promise that goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life as I follow and seek You. (Psalm 23:6)*

**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.*

**September 17 2020 (click for audio)**

***Ouch***

**Pause**

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

**Pause and pray**

**Prayer of Approach**

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

**Rejoice and Reflect**

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

*O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!  
Your glory is higher than the heavens.  
You have taught children and infants  
to tell of your strength,  
silencing your enemies  
and all who oppose you.*  
Psalm 8:1-2

**Pause and pray**

Today, I continue to reflect on what Isaiah has to say about justice. In today's reading, God gives His prophet the unenviable task of challenging the people of Israel about their bad behavior

*For day after day they seek me out;  
they seem eager to know my ways,  
as if they were a nation that does what is right  
and has not forsaken the commands of its God.  
They ask me for just decisions  
and seem eager for God to come near them.  
"Why have we fasted," they say,  
"and you have not seen it?  
Why have we humbled ourselves,  
and you have not noticed?"  
'Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please  
and exploit all your workers.  
Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,  
and in striking each other with wicked fists.  
You cannot fast as you do today  
and expect your voice to be heard on high.  
Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,  
only a day for people to humble themselves?  
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed  
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?  
Is that what you call a fast,*

*a day acceptable to the Lord?*

*Isaiah 58:2-5*

Ouch!

The people of Israel were praying and fasting – they were doing lots of religious-looking stuff. And yet, according to Isaiah, all this activity was only skin-deep, and he didn't hesitate to speak this uncomfortable truth.

His words make me feel uncomfortable too. I see myself in them. When I pray and fast and ask God for things, I'm also prone to being selfish. I treat people as things sometimes, trying to get what I need from them instead of giving myself to them. I argue with my wife, and I exasperate my children. I can humble myself one minute, and then be full of myself the next (even though I think I hide it pretty well). And because of this, Isaiah's question is an uncomfortable one... 'is this acceptable?'

### **Ask**

What can I say, but, forgive me Father, for I have sinned.

As I list the things I know that I have done, said, even things that I have thought that are unacceptable to you, Father, I repent and I ask for Your forgiveness.

### **Pause and pray**

'You do as you please, and exploit all your workers,' says Isaiah. The challenge is that a lot of what I buy has been made by workers who have been exploited in some way, and I'm not aware. This is not acceptable.

*I ask you, God, to take down the systems that exploit people, and build up those who have been exploited.*

### **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.

*For day after day they seek me out;  
they seem eager to know my ways,  
as if they were a nation that does what is right  
and has not forsaken the commands of its God.  
They ask me for just decisions  
and seem eager for God to come near them.  
"Why have we fasted," they say,  
"and you have not seen it?  
Why have we humbled ourselves,  
and you have not noticed?"  
'Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please  
and exploit all your workers.  
Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,  
and in striking each other with wicked fists.  
You cannot fast as you do today  
and expect your voice to be heard on high.  
Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,  
only a day for people to humble themselves?  
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed*

*and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?  
Is that what you call a fast,  
a day acceptable to the Lord?  
Isaiah 58:2-5*

The word 'hypocrite' comes from the Greek word hypocrites, which means 'actor' or 'pretender'. In the Gospel stories, we often see Jesus calling the religious leaders hypocrites. He gets angry with them because they make religion a pretense and a defense *against* reality, instead of the pathway to becoming fully real.

People don't need, nor want, a well-performed religion. People want an honest, authentic way of life that acts justly, loves mercy and walks humbly with God.

#### **Pause and pray**

#### **Yielding Prayer**

*Jesus, help me to follow You. Show me where I am 'acting' and 'pretending' my faith, and help me instead to live, true to You in every way. I yield to You today.*

#### **Yielding Promise**

*Thank you Jesus, that because of You, I am not condemned but set free from sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)*

#### **Closing Prayer**

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

**September 18 2020 (click for audio)**  
***Light Breaks Forth***

**Pause**

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

**Pause and pray**

**Prayer of Approach**

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

**Rejoice and Reflect**

I choose to rejoice today in God's creativity and power, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 8...

*When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—  
the moon and the stars you set in place—  
what are mere mortals that you should think about them,  
O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!  
Psalm 8:3-4,9*

**Pause and pray**

Today, I continue to reflect on one of the most well-known passages in the book of Isaiah, where he describes what happens when people pursue justice...

*'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter –  
when you see the naked, to clothe them,  
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?  
Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing will quickly appear;  
then your righteousness will go before you,  
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.  
Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;  
you will cry for help, and he will say: here am I.  
Isaiah 58:6-9a*

I remember getting up early one morning and venturing out to watch the sun rise at a seashore – it was truly glorious. As Isaiah says, the 'light breaks forth'... it filled the sky with stunning reds and oranges, which were reflected off the ripples in the sea and the pebbles along the shoreline, and the grains of sand glittered like millions of diamonds. People out walking their dogs stopped and stared in silence. We smiled at one another, as if we were sharing a divine moment.

When the sunlight breaks forth at dawn like this, it heralds a new day, and anything feels possible.

If you pursue justice, says Isaiah, then your light will break forth like the dawn. It will herald a new day, and anything will be possible.

### **Ask**

As I think about the day ahead, what can I do to loose the chains of injustice for others? How can I set the oppressed free? How can I share my food with the hungry?

*I ask You, Holy Spirit, to help me to see the injustice that other human beings are experiencing, and to equip me to do something about it.*

### **Pause and pray**

People experience oppression in all sorts of ways. Some feel burdened by debt, while others struggle with mental-health problems and depression.

As I think about those I know and I ask for light to break forth like the dawn in their lives, for 'healing to quickly appear'.

### **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.

*'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter –  
when you see the naked, to clothe them,  
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?  
Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing will quickly appear;  
then your righteousness will go before you,  
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.  
Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;  
you will cry for help, and he will say: here am I.  
Isaiah 58:6-9a*

Every government wants their nation to be strong and influential. To use Isaiah's words, political leaders want the 'light of their nations to break forth like the dawn'.

This will happen, says Isaiah, if we tackle injustice, if we offer relief to those who are weighed down, if we free the oppressed and feed the hungry, if we shelter those who have no home, and welcome the refugees. *Then the Lord will respond... 'Here am I.'*

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yielding Prayer**

*Spirit of the Sovereign Lord, may Your light break forth like the dawn in my nation. We are broken in so many ways.... may Your healing come quickly. We feel vulnerable right now... so please go before us, and*

*cover our backs, be our rear guard too. May Your will be done, may Your Kingdom come, in my nation, Lord.*

**Yielding Promise**

*Thank You, Lord, for Your promise that You long to be gracious to us, and that You bring compassion to us. (Isaiah 30:18)*

**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.*

**September 19 2020 (click for audio)**  
***Binding Up The Brokenhearted***

**Pause**

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

**Pause and pray**

**Prayer of Approach**

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

**Rejoice and Reflect**

I choose to rejoice today in God's incredible works, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 9...

*I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart;  
I will tell of all the marvelous things you have done.  
I will be filled with joy because of you.  
I will sing praises to your name, O Most High.  
Psalm 9:1-2*

**Pause and pray**

Today, I am reflecting on the first few verses of Isaiah 61. 700 years before Jesus is born, Isaiah prophesies about the Messiah – literally ‘the anointed one’ - the one who will be gifted with capacity and commissioned with authority...

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
and provide for those who grieve in Zion –  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty  
instead of ashes,  
the oil of joy  
instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise  
instead of a spirit of despair.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the Lord  
for the display of his splendor.  
Isaiah 61:1-3*

This is a familiar passage – one which speaks to me in different ways every time I hear it or read it. Which words or phrases caught my attention just now?

‘He has sent me,’ says Isaiah, ‘to bind up the broken-hearted.’ Who are the broken-hearted? Those who feel like their hearts are literally being squeezed. Those who can barely breathe. Those who feel silenced by pain.

The pain of a broken relationship. The loss of someone dearly loved. The death of a dream. The rejection of a child. The onset of despair.

‘The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord has sent me’ to such as these, says Isaiah. To wrap them up, to bandage them, to bind them back together. And He sends me too.

### **Ask**

In Psalm 34, David says that the Lord is “*close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*” (Ps. 34:18)

Is there someone I know who is broken-hearted right now? *I ask You Lord to show me how I can join You in being close to them this week – maybe by texting or visiting them and listening. Help me to be sensitive to, and maybe to join in with, the ‘binding up’ work that You are doing by Your Spirit.*

### **Pause and pray**

*I ask You Father, to anoint the churches in the community where I live to ‘bind up the broken-hearted’, to become places of healing and hope. I name them now, and I pray that You fill them all with Your Spirit.*

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yield**

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

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s faveur  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
and provide for those who grieve in Zion –  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty  
instead of ashes,  
the oil of joy  
instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise  
instead of a spirit of despair.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the Lord  
for the display of his splendor.*  
*Isaiah 61:1-3*

This is a familiar passage because it also appears in Luke’s Gospel, when Jesus uses it to announce the start of His ministry. (Luke 4:18-19) It’s interesting to note that when Jesus quotes this passage, he skips the vengeance bit, and then adds a line from Isaiah 58, “to set the oppressed free” (Isa. 58:6)

When Jesus finishes reading Isaiah's words, he rolls up the scroll and says, 'Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing' (Lk.4:21) to the astonishment of those listening.

Like many passages in the Bible, Isaiah's words *have been* fulfilled. And yet they are also *being* fulfilled, continually, in and through the lives of those who follow Jesus, including me.

### **Pause and pray**

#### **Yielding Prayer**

*I place my hand over my own heart.*

*Spirit of the Sovereign Lord, I yield myself to You. Be upon me. Fill me. Work through me... for the sake of those who are poor, for those who are imprisoned, for those who are broken-hearted, for those who are in darkness and cannot see, for those who are oppressed. May this be a year of favor and salvation for them.*

#### **Yielding Promise**

*I praise You, Sovereign Lord that you promise to draw close to those who are broken-hearted, and save those who are crushed in Spirit (Ps.34:18)*

#### **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.*

**September 20 2020 (click for audio)**  
***A Sabbath Prayer***

At the end of a week thinking about justice, it's easy to feel relentlessly responsible for tackling all the world's insurmountable problems. But today I pause and receive again God's grace and mercy.  
'Come, all you who are thirsty,' He says, 'come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!' Isaiah 55:1

**Pause and pray**

At the end of a week thinking about justice, it's easy to feel relentlessly responsible for tackling all the world's insurmountable problems. But today I pause and receive again God's grace and mercy.  
'Come, all you who are thirsty,' He says, 'come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!' Isaiah 55:1

**Pause and pray**

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

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

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

\*Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, p.6

**Pause and pray**

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

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

**Pause and pray**

**Sabbath blessing**

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

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

*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](http://petegreig.info)

## September 21 2020 (click for audio)

*Henri Nouwen, A Hero of Prayer and Learning*

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 Henri Nouwen, a passionate hero of learning and 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 righteousness and justice, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 9...

*But the Lord reigns forever,  
executing judgment from his throne.  
He will judge the world with justice  
and rule the nations with fairness.*

*Psalm 9:7-8*

### **Pause and pray**

As a child in the Netherlands, Henri Nouwen was educated by Jesuits, and even though he decided he wouldn't be a Jesuit priest because it required too much study, he went on to spend much of his life learning.

When he was ordained at just 25 years old, Henri was drawn to the importance of psychology – despite the fact Church circles at the time thought it undermined Christian faith. He graduated as a psychologist in 1963, before moving to America to study further. This period of learning informed his teaching and writing on pastoral theology, leading him to lecture at Notre Dame, Yale and Harvard universities. He was known and appreciated for teaching on themes of depression, intimacy and love.

Henri focused his often personal, autobiographical writing style on the 'theology of the heart', seeking a personal connection with Jesus that shaped everything else. He said in one of his later books,

'The knowledge of Jesus' heart is a knowledge of the heart. And when we live in the world with that knowledge, we cannot do other than bring healing, reconciliation, new life and hope wherever we go.'\*

\* Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, p.2

For Henri, learning about Jesus was more than just head-knowledge. He was focused and passionate about the way human hearts and bodies connect with Jesus in prayer, worship and adoration; the intimacy of a personal relationship, rather than just religious ritual or theological knowledge.

Our love and devotion of Jesus begins with a posture of openness of both heart and body; allowing Jesus to love us, so that we can love Him in return, and then reflect His love to others.

### **Ask**

Sometimes, I am too quick to focus on what Jesus has *done* for me, or what He can *do* for me, rather than how He *feels* about me.

*Jesus, help me to know Your heart for me afresh, today.*

### **Pause and pray**

*Lord, help me to step into the world with a deeper understanding of Your intimate love for me, and for others. God, who is my neighbor I ask You to give me a name, bring someone specific to mind. How can I demonstrate Your love to them today?*

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yield**

Later in his life, Henri devoted himself to caring for those with learning disabilities amongst the L'Arche community in Canada. During this time, he wrote,

'God's presence is often a hidden presence, a presence that needs to be discovered. The loud boisterous noises of the world make us deaf to the soft, gentle and loving voice of God.'\*\*

Henri realized at L'Arche that to encounter God means actively, intentionally and attentively seeking Him, and the intimacy of His presence.

\*\* Henri Nouwen, *In the name of Jesus*, p.69

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yielding Prayer**

*So today, Lord, I recommit my time, energy and intention to you with a prayer written by Henri Nouwen:*

*I so much want to be in control.*

*I want to be the master of my own destiny.*

*Still I know that you are saying:*

*'Let me take you by the hand and lead you.*

*Accept my love*

*and trust that where I will bring you,  
the deepest desires of your heart will be fulfilled.'*

*Lord, open my hands to receive your gift of love.*

*Amen.\*\*\**

\*\*\* <https://henrinouwen.org/meditation/a-prayer/>

**Yielding Promise**

*Thank you for your promise that you delight in us; that because of your love, you rejoice over us.  
(Zeph 3:17)*

**Closing Prayer**

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

## September 22 2020 (click for audio)

### *Positioned for Influence*

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**

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

#### **Rejoice and Reflect**

I choose to rejoice today in God's protection for those in need, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 9...

*The Lord is a shelter for the oppressed,  
a refuge in times of trouble.  
Those who know your name trust in you,  
for you, O Lord, do not abandon those who search for you.*

*Psalm 9:9-10*

#### **Pause and pray**

This week I reflect on the story of Esther, a book of the Bible in which God is never explicitly mentioned and the word 'prayer' isn't found. Yet in this story of wealth, excess, political intrigue and abuse of power, I find moments of unexpected favor and coincidence that cast the shadow of an ever-present God across its pages.

I begin the story with the Persian King Xerxes hunting for a new wife, and Esther, a young Jewish woman living in exile, whose life is about to be dramatically changed...

*When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem.*

*Esther 2:8-9*

I find this story very hard to read as a 21st century woman. An impulsive and oppressive King wants a wife, so the most attractive women in his Kingdom must compete for him. This isn't a beauty pageant or a Disney princess origin story. There's no fairy godmother, just a man in

charge of a harem. There's no ball where the central couple fall in love - just one night, one shot to please a fickle King.

Did these women want to be there? Did they volunteer for a chance at wealth and power? Or were they 'taken'; their freedom restricted; their chances at marriage and family reduced? I don't know.

In the midst of this uncertainty I find Esther. Her story highlights that God's people aren't immune to difficulty and suffering. The Bible shares many stories like hers. Stories of refugees and slaves, of the exiled and imprisoned, of the persecuted and the executed. Scripture doesn't flinch from the fact that then, like today, good people are affected by evil and suffering.

### **Ask**

Esther didn't know at this point in her story that even in the challenging position she found herself in, God could use her influence to bring about great good. Could God use my position to do good - even in places and situations that seem entirely bad?

*God, I ask You to help me see the influence and opportunity of where I am. Direct my prayer and my action to bring Your good.*

### **Pause and pray**

I don't know whether all the women in King Xerxes harem were there voluntarily or not. However, over 15 million people around the world today are trafficked into forced marriages\*.

*God, I ask You to meet with every person trapped in this situation. Lord, would You work for their freedom and restoration.*

*\*<https://www.stopthetraffik.org/about-human-trafficking/the-scale-of-human-trafficking/>*

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yield**

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

*When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem.*

*Esther 2:8-9*

God doesn't take Esther out of the Palace, but it's clear as I read through her story, that God is present, He is working for good, and eventually He positions Esther to stop a genocide. She goes on to gain the favor of Hegai, the person in charge of King Xerxes' harem. Hegai will later go on to help Esther succeed. Could this be the first glimpse of God at work behind the scenes of this story?

Where might God be working behind the scenes in my life right now?

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yielding Prayer**

*Jesus, following You does not insulate me from pain or challenge, but Your presence is with me in every situation. I yield my life to Your care again and I ask You to work through my prayer and action wherever I am.*

### **Yielding Promise**

*I thank you God for the words of Isaiah 43, the reassurance of your presence in difficult situations: 'When [I] pass through the waters, [You] will be with [me]; and when [I] pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over [me]. When [I] walk through the fire, [I] will not be burned; the flames will not set [me] ablaze. (Isaiah 43:2)*

### **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.*

## September 23 2020 (click for audio)

### *Prayer and Favor*

Each day we will P.R.A.Y. – ‘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**

*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, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 10...

*I will exalt you, Lord, for you rescued me.  
You refused to let my enemies triumph over me.  
O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,  
and you restored my health.  
You brought me up from the grave, O Lord.  
You kept me from falling into the pit of death.  
Sing to the Lord, all you godly ones!  
Praise his holy name.  
For his anger lasts only a moment,  
but his favor lasts a lifetime!  
Weeping may last through the night,  
but joy comes with the morning.*

*Psalm 30:1-5*

#### **Pause and pray**

Today I return to the story of Esther. After twelve months of preparation in a harem, this young Jewish woman is ready to meet the Persian King Xerxes...

*When the turn came for Esther (the young woman Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.*

*Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.*

*Esther 2:15-17*

For Esther, a year preparing herself in a Persian harem led to one night with the King. This would be the encounter that decided whether she was swept aside and forgotten, or plucked from obscurity to royal position.

Were Mordecai and her friends praying for her?  
Was Esther herself crying out to God for help?  
The Bible doesn't tell me, but I think it's very likely.

### **Ask**

Esther won the favor of everyone who met her, including the King. God was with her, working unseen within her story.

How often has God intervened unseen in my life? Where do I need Him to intervene today?  
*God, I bring these situations to You now.*

### **Pause and pray**

Esther has been elevated to the most powerful household in Persia. She has an opportunity to influence the King and shape events on a national level.

*I pray now for the Christian politicians and advisors in the corridors of power in my nation. God, I ask You to fill them with Your Spirit, give them Your wisdom and help them to use their influence for Your purposes.*

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yield**

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

*When the turn came for Esther (the young woman Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.*

*Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.*

*Esther 2:15-17*

Esther had to compete for the favor of King Xerxes; an impulsive, selfish, war-mongering leader. Even in her new position of Queen, there was a risk she would be deposed as her predecessor had been.

How different Esther's situation is to my own. I too serve a King, King Jesus, but I don't need to compete for His attention. His character could not be more opposite to Xerxes and as Psalm 30 reminds me, His favor lasts a lifetime (Psalm 30:5).

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yielding Prayer**

*King Jesus, I yield my life, my influence, my opinions and plans to You. Thank You that You favor me. I trust Your rule and reign in my life today.*

**Yielding Promise**

*Thank you that I can trust You my God and my King, because as Psalm 30 reminds me, Your, 'anger lasts only a moment, but [Your] favor lasts a lifetime' (Psalm 30:5)*

**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.*

*September 24 2020 (click for audio)*

*For Such A Time As This*

**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 majesty, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 8...

*O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!  
Your glory is higher than the heavens.  
You have taught children and infants  
to tell of your strength,  
silencing your enemies  
and all who oppose you.*

*Psalm 8:1-2*

**Pause and pray**

Today I reflect on a pivotal moment in the story of Esther. A plan is in motion to wipe out the Jewish people and Esther's uncle Mordecai is urging her to use her position, risk her life and plead for the salvation of her people...

*When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: 'Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?'*

*Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.'*

*Esther 4:12-16*

Esther's declaration sounds a little melodramatic until I realize that she could be killed for approaching King Xerxes uninvited. Her mission to save the Jews could fail before she even opens her mouth.

As Esther weighs the danger, I see a shift in her character. Until now she has listened to and taken direction from others - primarily her Uncle. Now, as she prepares for something only she is positioned to do, Esther takes the lead and directs her Uncle and others to fast.

### **Ask**

In the Bible, fasting often accompanies an urgent focus in prayer. What do I care deeply about and where do I want to see God's saving power at work?

*God, show me how I can fast about this in the coming week? What can I sacrifice - maybe food or something else - to make more time to pray?*

### **Pause and pray**

Esther was willing to risk execution to save her nation. How does my nation need saving? Do we need God's urgent intervention in government, crime, education, health, the economy or issues of injustice like racial inequality?

*Holy Spirit, I ask You to highlight one national issue that I can pray for now.*

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yield**

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

*When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: 'Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?'*

*Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.'*

*Esther 4:12-16*

Timing is everything. God is not explicitly named in the book of Esther yet I can see His fingerprints in the unfolding of the story. At the very moment the people of Israel are threatened with genocide, the newly appointed Queen of Persia is herself Jewish, something she has kept to herself.

Esther is uniquely positioned to intercede - to stand on behalf of her people, before her husband King Xerxes.

Where am I uniquely positioned?

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yielding Prayer**

*Lord, I trust that You are at work, even when I am unaware of Your action and cannot yet see Your purpose. Teach me to pray with the courage and leadership of Esther. Direct my intercession toward those who need it most.*

### **Yielding Promise**

*Thank you Lord, that I can confidently approach You and, 'that if [I] ask anything according to [Your] will, [You] hear [me].' (1 John 5:14)*

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.

**September 25 2020 (click for audio)**

*This is My Request*

**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 kindness and love, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 13...

*But I trust in your unfailing love.  
I will rejoice because you have rescued me.  
I will sing to the Lord  
because he is good to me.  
Psalm 13:5-6*

**Pause and pray**

Today I reflect on the climax of Esther's story. She's risking her life, her royal position and revealing the secret of her ethnicity, in a desperate attempt to save the Jewish people from genocide...

*So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet, and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, 'Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.' Then Queen Esther answered, 'If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life – this is my petition. And spare my people – this is my request.*

*Esther 7:1-3*

Esther has fasted, prepared and now the moment has come to ask for the King's help. Before her is the one person who has the authority and power to save her people. I wonder how she felt as the King asked, 'What is your petition?'

**Ask**

I imagine a throne in my mind, I may want to use a chair to help me picture it. I imagine King Jesus, sitting on this throne. The one person with the authority and power to help me.

I hear Jesus ask me, 'What is your petition?'

How do I respond?

What is the most important thing I want Jesus to help me with today?

**Pause and pray**

Keeping the image of King Jesus on His throne in my imagination, I think about the person I know who most needs His help. Maybe it's a sick friend or family member, or someone struggling with debt or depression?

I hear Jesus ask me, 'What is your request?'

I imagine bringing that person and their needs to Jesus now.

### **Pause and pray**

#### **Yield**

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

*So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet, and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, 'Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.'*

*Then Queen Esther answered, 'If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life – this is my petition. And spare my people – this is my request.'*

*Esther 7:1-3*

The Jewish people were exiles in Persia. An oppressed minority attempting to stay faithful to God. Esther could have chosen to stay silent and may have lived when the rest of her people died. Instead, she chose to use her voice, at great personal risk, and God brought about change. Four months ago today, the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and his final words, 'I can't breathe', sparked an international outcry. The events of that day brought into crisp focus how black people and communities of many different ethnicities are oppressed and treated as less in my day, and in my nation.

### **Pause and pray**

#### **Yielding Prayer**

*King Jesus, my first allegiance is to You. I yield my reputation, my social status and my influence. Show me where I am blind to compromise, or silent on issues of injustice. Empower me to take risks and raise my voice to speak for equality and dignity for all people today.*

#### **Yielding Promise**

*I take comfort today that even when I take a risk and speak up, You, 'Lord [love] the just and will not forsake [Your] faithful ones.' (Psalm 37:28)*

#### **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.*

## September 26 2020 (click for audio)

### *T.S. Eliot - Hero of Creativity*

On Feast Days we pause from praying the Bible to celebrate the stories and learn from the lives of heroes of faith, whose collective witness embodies the 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 legacy of T.S. Eliot, born on this day in 1888 in St Louis Missouri, a true hero of creativity.

#### **Pause**

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

#### **Pause and pray**

#### **Prayer of Approach**

*Creator God, who formed us from the dust, breathe in me again. Put a new song in my heart and grant me a new imagination to perceive greater possibilities in your world today.*

#### **Rejoice and Reflect**

I choose to rejoice today in the beauty and majesty of God, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 45...

*Beautiful words stir my heart.  
I will recite a lovely poem about the king,  
for my tongue is like the pen of a skillful poet.  
You are the most handsome of all.  
Gracious words stream from your lips.  
God himself has blessed you forever.  
Put on your sword, O mighty warrior!  
You are so glorious, so majestic!  
In your majesty, ride out to victory,  
defending truth, humility, and justice.  
Go forth to perform awe-inspiring deeds!  
Psalm 45:1-4*

#### **Pause and pray**

T.S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land", published four years after the end of the First World War, is considered by many to be the most influential poem of the twentieth century.

Five years later he shocked the literary world by becoming a Christian, as a result of an essay by the agnostic Bertrand Russell. Eliot's new-found faith was sharply criticized, but he responded with poems and essays describing secular humanism as an experiment doomed to failure. 'We must be very patient in awaiting its collapse,' he wrote, 'meanwhile redeeming the time: so that the Faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the world from suicide.\*

\*T S Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939)

Eliot, who went on to win the Nobel Prize for literature, considered his greatest work to be *Four Quartets*, a poem exploring the themes of incarnation, salvation and eternity. It concludes with a poem called 'Little Gidding' named after a former monastic community.

As I read part of it now, I remind myself that poetry requires reflection and slow exploration - a bit like the approach of Lectio 365.

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
(...)*

*And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well  
When the tongues of flames are in-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one. \*\**

\*\* T S Eliot, 'Little Gidding' V, No. 4 of *Four Quartets* (originally published 1942)

I tend to map my life out along a chronological timeline, but Eliot seems to see life cyclically. Eventually, he says, we all arrive back where we started 'and know the place for the first time.'\*\*\*

\*\*\* T S Eliot, 'Little Gidding' V, No. 4 of *Four Quartets* (originally published 1942)

### Ask

Is there a situation I'm currently asking God to change, a person or a place I'd like to leave behind, or an old set of problems He is asking me to revisit with new eyes?

*My tendency is always to pray my problems away but today I ask instead that You, God, would help me to receive and perceive them with grace.*

### Pause and pray

Quoting the 14th century mystic Julian of Norwich, T.S. Eliot declares that 'all shall be well... when the tongues of flames are in-folded.' It's a reference to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

I pray now for 'tongues of flame' upon a new generation of writers, artists, thinkers and poets like T.S. Eliot.

### Pause and pray

### Yield

In 'Little Gidding', T.S. Eliot, this great wordsmith, celebrates the limitation of words in the realm of prayer. He writes:

'You are here to kneel  
Where prayer has been valid.  
And prayer is more  
Than an order of words,

the conscious occupation

Of the praying mind,

or the sound of the voice praying' \*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\* T S Eliot, 'Little Gidding' I, No. 4 of *Four Quartets* (originally published 1942)

'Prayer is more than an order of words... or the sound of the voice praying.' Beyond asking in prayer, there is listening, and beyond conversation with God there is an invitation to silent communion.

The aim of Lectio 365, therefore, is not so much to 'do' prayer as to 'become' a prayer in all I do. It's not about ticking prayer off my list of necessary daily activities, but rather becoming more prayerfully aware of God's presence throughout the coming day. *Come Holy Spirit, I pray, and draw me into a deeper place of silent communion with Jesus.*

### **Pause and pray**

#### **Yielding Prayer**

I yield today to the Lord by reflecting on another poem from T.S. Eliot:

'In order to arrive at what you do not know

You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.

In order to possess what you do not possess

You must go by the way of dispossession.

In order to arrive at what you are not

You must go through the way in which you are not.'\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\* T S Eliot, 'East Coker' III, No. 2 of *Four Quartets* (originally published 1940)

Lord, I know nothing and You know everything, teach me your ways.

Lord, I relinquish my possessions, opening my hands to give more generously and thus to receive afresh you.

Lord, I long for You to change me into someone new, even if it means stepping out of the security and familiarity of things as they are now.

#### **Yielding Promise**

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So [I] say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid." (Hebrews 13:5-6)

#### **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.

## September 27 2020 (click for audio)

### *A Sabbath Prayer*

Every Sunday we take a break from our usual rhythm of Pausing, Rejoicing and Reflecting, Asking and Yielding to pray the Bible and embrace a day of rest.

Eugene Peterson describes Sabbath as 'a time to receive silence and let it deepen into gratitude'.\*

\*Eugene Peterson, *Tell it Slant*, p.82

And so, on this day of rest, as I prepare to pray, I settle into silence and allow thankfulness to bubble up inside me.

### **Pause and pray**

A prayer of contentment from Psalm 131:

*'My heart is not proud, Lord,  
my eyes are not haughty;  
I do not concern myself with great matters  
or things too wonderful for me.  
But I have calmed and quietened myself,  
I am like a weaned child with its mother;  
like a weaned child I am content.  
Israel, put your hope in the Lord  
both now and for evermore.'*

In the silence of this moment, I express my deep gratitude for the Church:

*Father, thank You for Your beautiful, multicultural, inter-generational family, gathering today online and in person, in so many countries. Revive and sanctify us, I pray. Make us a house of prayer for all nations. And set our hearts on fire again with the good news of Your gospel.*

I take a moment now to earth these big prayers locally by naming members of my own church, and friends who are finding life particularly tough.

### **Pause and pray**

I dedicate the coming week to Jesus:

*Thank You, Father, for loving me with all Your heart, all Your soul and all Your mind.*

*Inspire me this week to love You more with all of mine.*

*Thank You, Jesus, for Your faithful and sacrificial friendship.*

*Help me this week to be a faithful and sacrificial friend like You.*

*Thank You, Holy Spirit, for listening to my many thoughts and words and dreams.*

*Still my soul this week to listen much more carefully to Yours.*

### **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](http://petegreig.info)

## September 28 2020 (click for audio)

### *Giving Everything*

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**

*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 the protection of God, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 16...

*Keep me safe, O God,  
for I have come to you for refuge.  
I said to the Lord, "You are my Master!  
Every good thing I have comes from you.  
Psalm 16:1-2*

#### **Pause and pray**

Today, at the start of my journey with Samuel, I am reflecting on Hannah's extraordinary decision to give her first-born son to the Lord, to be cared for and taught by Eli the priest.

*After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli, and she said to him, 'Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.' And he worshiped the Lord there.*

*1 Samuel 1:24-28*

It wasn't an easy decision for Hannah to give her first-born son, Samuel, to the Lord.

While her husband's other wife, Peninnah, had given birth to many children, Hannah hadn't been able to bear any, leaving her in tears and unable to eat.

In the temple one day, Hannah wept – the Bible says that her soul was bitter – and she whispered a desperate prayer back to God. (1 Samuel 1:11)

Nine months later, Hannah gave birth to Samuel, and in that moment, Hannah learned

something deep and permanent about God's love for her. Three years later, she fulfilled her promise to God. He had given her a son, and now she was giving him back to the Lord.

### **Ask**

Is there something that I have been asking God for? Maybe something so deep and so difficult that my soul has become bitter and my prayers are only whispers right now. Hannah's story teaches me to hope, and so once again, I ask You to remember me, Lord.

### **Pause and pray**

And I ask You to remember others that I know too, Lord. The friend who has been unable to bear the child that they long for; the friend whose soul has become bitter through disappointment.

*God, teach them something deep and permanent about Your love 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.

*After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli, and she said to him, 'Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.' And he worshiped the Lord there.*

*1 Samuel 1:24-28*

When Hannah gives everything she has – in this case, her first-born son – she makes space for her son Samuel to receive new things.

In the same way, Jesus asks me to give to Him everything that I have received so far – even things that He has given to me – so that there is space for Him to teach me new things.

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yielding Prayer**

*Jesus, I give everything to You again – my heart, my mind, my soul and my strength. All that I am, and all that I have. I give it all to You, and I ask that You teach me Your ways. Teach me something new about You today.*

### **Yielding Promise**

*Thank you Lord, for your promise in Proverbs that when I trust in you with all of my heart, that you will show me the way to go. (Proverbs 3:5-6 NLT)*

### **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.*

**September 29 2020 (click for audio)**

*Evan Roberts: Hero of Prayer and Mission*

On Feast Days we pause from praying the Bible to celebrate the stories and learn from the lives of heroes of faith, whose collective witness embodies our six practices at the heart of Lectio 365. These practices are: prayer and creativity, justice and hospitality, learning and mission. Today therefore we are thanking God for the extraordinary example of Evan Roberts, a hero of prayer and 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 the wonders that God does, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 107...

*Let them praise the Lord for his great love  
and for the wonderful things he has done for them.  
For he satisfies the thirsty  
and fills the hungry with good things.  
Psalm 107:8-9*

### **Pause and pray**

Evan Roberts was born in Loughor, Wales in 1878, the ninth of fourteen children! At 11 or 12 years old Evan left education to follow his Father into the coal mines and later worked as an apprentice blacksmith to his Uncle. With such a limited education Roberts was not widely read, but there was one book he was never without and read from cover to cover; the Bible that he carried, even into the mines! Evan Roberts could often be found poring over God's word in a spare moment. He was also deeply dedicated to prayer and would often miss sleep to pray through the night.

Feeling called to ministry, Roberts left work and went to college. In his first month he experienced a baptism of the Holy Spirit and felt compelled to share it with others, longing and praying for God to send revival to Wales. On this day in 1904, at just 26 years old, Evan Roberts stood at the end of a prayer meeting in his home church, and shared this invitation with just 17 people:

1. Confess of your sins
2. Get rid of anything in your life that could get between you and God
3. Obey the Holy Spirit
4. Publicly declare Jesus as Saviour

All 17 made a commitment and over the following week dozens more responded to Roberts' call. From there he began touring Wales, sharing his call to holiness and a Spirit-led life. Thousands flocked to meetings marked by testimonies of transformation, spontaneous song, and passionate prayer. Over the following eighteen months an estimated 100,000 people made commitments to Christ! We now know this incredible move of God as the Welsh Revival. Newspapers and Christian publications reported on how this movement transformed communities,

'A wonderful revival is sweeping over Wales. The whole country, from the city to the colliery (coal mine) underground, is aflame with Gospel glory. Police courts are hardly necessary; bars and pubs are being deserted, old debts are being paid to satisfy awakened consciences, and definite and unmistakable answers to prayer are being recorded.\*

\*Reported in the Ram's Horn, excerpt in *Principles to Change the World* (1983) p173

It was even reported that the ponies in the mining pits worked much slower as they were used to being sworn at. They didn't know how to respond to being treated gently.

The impact of this move of God was felt far beyond the church buildings. The Holy Spirit moved throughout Wales impacting people, families, businesses and whole communities.

### **Ask**

I imagine myself in the crowd as Evan Roberts is speaking. How do I respond to his challenge today?

Is there something I need to confess? Is there anything in my life that's getting between me and God? Am I actively listening to the Holy Spirit, ready to obey?

### **Pause and pray**

I try to imagine what the impact would be like if 100,000 chose to follow Jesus today?

*God, on behalf of my nation, I cry out to You now; send a revival of Your Spirit that ends addictions, mends marriages, conquers crime and welcomes hundreds of thousands into Your kingdom.*

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yield**

Evan Roberts wrote about a profound and personal moment while in prayer at the beginning of the 1904 revival,

'God's Spirit came to me one night, when upon my knees I asked Him for guidance, and five months later I was baptized with the Spirit. I know that the work which has been done through me is not due to any human ability that I possess. It is His work and to His glory.'\*\*

\*\*John Peters, *Great Revivalists* (CWR, 2008) p95

Evan Roberts was a young, working class man, and by many accounts was not impressive or well educated. He wasn't a great preacher and insisted that the revival he was living through was all God's work, not his own.

Do I believe that God could move through me like He did through Evan Roberts? Or do I feel under qualified, inexperienced, out-classed, too young, too old, or simply inadequate?

### **Yielding Prayer**

*Thank you Lord, that You didn't make a mistake when You made me. I confess that sometimes I feel like I need to be more, to be worthy of serving You. I surrender to You, Holy Spirit, revive me, and through me, revive my family, my community and my nation today.*

### **Yielding Promise**

*Thank You that your word proclaims and promises that you will continue to work as you have done in the past: 'Many, Lord my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us.' (Psalm 40:5)*

### **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.*

*September 30 2020 (click for audio)*

*The Sons of Eli*

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

#### **Pause**

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

#### **Pause and pray**

#### **Prayer of Approach**

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...

*Lord, you alone are my inheritance, my cup of blessing.  
You guard all that is mine.  
The land you have given me is a pleasant land.  
What a wonderful inheritance!  
Psalm 16:5-6*

#### **Pause and pray**

Today, I am continuing to reflect on the life of Samuel, long before he became a prophet in Israel. As a child, Samuel learned from Eli the priest and served in the temple. Unfortunately, Eli's two sons - Hophni and Phineas - chose a very different path...

*The sin of [Eli's sons] was very great in the Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt. But Samuel was ministering before the Lord - a boy wearing a linen ephod. Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, 'May the Lord give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the Lord.' Then they would go home. And the Lord was gracious to Hannah; she gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.*

*1 Samuel 2:17-21*

Eli's sons were wicked.

They were taking the gifts and sacrifices that other people had brought for God, to fulfill their own selfish desires. Samuel, on the other hand, was *himself* a gift, given sacrificially by his mother, Hannah, to fulfill a selfless promise to God. The contrast could not be clearer.

Sometimes the difference between good and evil, between right and wrong, is easy to see. But all too often it isn't, and I'm left wondering how to say or do the right thing. Who should I join or support? What shouldn't I buy? What should I say or not say?

Learning to live right and speak right isn't as easy as it seems... but perhaps there is a clue in the final line of today's passage: 'the boy Samuel grew up *in the presence of the Lord.*' (v21)

### **Ask**

Where I face a clear choice between right and wrong, I ask You, Lord, to give me the strength to resist temptation. Please deliver me from evil.

*Where things are less clear, I ask You, Lord, to give me a gift of discernment. Help me to know right from wrong.*

### **Pause and pray**

I think about places and situations around the world, or maybe even in my own community, where wicked things are taking place, where evil has taken root. I ask You God to deliver those who are suffering. I pray for Your presence to be felt in those places, for light to shine into the darkness.

### **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 sin of [Eli's sons] was very great in the Lord's sight, for they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt. But Samuel was ministering before the Lord - a boy wearing a linen ephod. Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, 'May the Lord give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the Lord.' Then they would go home. And the Lord was gracious to Hannah; she gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.*

*1 Samuel 2:17-21*

For me, the remarkable thing about Eli's prayer for Hannah and Elkanah isn't that it was answered. It's that Eli prayed such a big, bold prayer of blessing for others, when his own sons were so evil. Somehow, Eli hadn't let his heart become hard and bitter - he hadn't allowed his personal circumstances to overshadow what he had learned about God's grace and kindness - and so he was able to continue praying his very best prayers for others.

### **Pause and pray**

### **Yielding Prayer**

*God, like Samuel, I want to grow up in Your presence. Where my heart has become hardened through difficult circumstances and disappointments, I yield all of this to You, and I receive Your grace. Help me to pray my best prayers for others.*

**Yielding Promise**

*Thank you Lord, for your promise that your ears are attentive to the prayers that I pray. (1 Peter 3:12)*

**Closing Prayer**

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

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

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

*Amen.*