

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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January 2021

January 1	January 2	January 3	January 4
January 5	January 6	January 7	January 8
January 9	January 10	January 11	January 12
January 13	January 14	January 15	January 16
January 17	January 18	January 19	January 20
January 21	January 22	January 23	January 24
January 25	January 26	January 27	January 28
January 29	January 30	January 31	

Audio for Each Day in MP3 Format

[Month of January 2021](#)

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January 01 2021 (click for audio)

The New Year's Revolution

Today is Friday the 1st of January 2021. Happy New Year! As today is New Year's Day, we continue to pause our usual rhythm to think and pray about the year ahead.

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, I still my soul now and remember that You are here with me, You are here in me, You are here for me. Lord Jesus, I worship You. Holy Spirit, I welcome You.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth!
Worship the Lord with gladness.
Come before him, singing with joy.
Acknowledge that the Lord is God!
He made us, and we are his.
We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving;
go into his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the Lord is good.
His unfailing love continues forever,
and his faithfulness continues to each generation.
Psalm 100

On this, the 1st of January, the birth of a new year, I am reflecting on the birth of the Early Church in the book of Acts and also a key moment in the life of the church in the 1700s.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 2:1-4

At 3am on New Year's Day, 1739, the Holy Spirit also came to an all-night prayer meeting in Fetter Lane, London. 'The power of God came mightily upon us,' recorded John Wesley in his journal, 'insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy and many fell to the ground.'* Echoing the experience of those who were propelled out of the upper room in Jerusalem to preach the gospel, John Wesley, too, was propelled out of that prayer room in London to ride 125,000 miles preaching the gospel, while his brother Charles Wesley began writing 6,000 hymns. And their 25-year-old friend, George Whitfield, crossed the Atlantic to stir the fires of America's First Great Awakening. The world would never be the same again.

*'The Journal of John Wesley', John Wesley

Ask

Jesus said that the Father loves to give the Spirit to those who ask (Matthew 7:11) - just as John and Charles Wesley asked that day in London.

And so, as I open my hands in front of me, I ask You, Father, to fill me with Your Spirit. Fill me with new power for this new year, just as You filled those disciples 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem, and 282 years ago in Fetter Lane, London.

Pause and pray

And now, I lift up my hands and I pray for my community, for my nation, and for the nations of the world. I ask You, Father, to stir the fires of another Great Awakening of Your Spirit.

Pause and pray**Yield**

As I return to this familiar passage, I try to imagine what it was like to be in that room, seeing what seemed like tongues of fire dancing in the air, being filled with the Holy Spirit for the very first time.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 2:1-4 (NIV UK)

The Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in other tongues. As the story continues, the Spirit enabled them to speak about Jesus with boldness, to endure hardship and persecution, to perform miracles, to serve the poor, to discern and make difficult decisions, and much more. These are the kinds of things that Spirit-enabled people do. What might the Spirit be enabling me to do this year?

Pause and pray**Yielding Prayer**

The Methodist Covenant prayer, written by John Wesley himself in 1755, is prayed by millions of Methodists at the start of every year. It's a liturgy of profound and beautiful surrender, and so I join with sisters and brothers in Christ around the world as I pray it now.

I am no longer my own, but Yours.
Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;
Put me to doing, put me to suffering;
Let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,
Exalted for you, or brought low for you;
Let me be full,
Let me be empty,
Let me have all things,
Let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
To your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
You are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.**

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.

****Methodist Covenant Prayer, <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/what-is-distinctive-about-methodism/a-covenant-with-god/>**

January 02 2021 (click for audio)

New Year's Revolution

Today is Saturday the 2nd of January, and we are continuing to reflect on the 'three great loves' at the heart of Christian discipleship, asking; how can we love God, love others, and love the world more in the year to come.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Loving Father, I still my soul now and remember that You are here with me, You are here in me, You are here for me. Lord Jesus, I worship You. Holy Spirit, I welcome You.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's strength today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 66...

Let all that I am wait quietly before God,
for my hope is in him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress where I will not be shaken.
My victory and honor come from God alone.
He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me.
O my people, trust in him at all times.
Pour out your heart to him,
for God is our refuge.
Psalm 66:5-8

Today, I am returning to Matthew 22, where Jesus is being questioned by the religious leaders. On this occasion I'm particularly interested in the second half of Jesus' response.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'
Matthew 22:34-40

These two great commandments are at the heart of the Old Testament law (Deut 6:5, Lev 19:18). Jesus knows who He's talking to; and he responds with verses that they will immediately recognize.

But Jesus demonstrates that these powerful commands - to love God and love others - are connected. More than that, they are inseparable. John's gospel, and his letters, are filled with the profound revelation that God is love, and therefore, that 'love comes from God.' 'Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God,' he writes. 'Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.' (1 John 4:7-8) Wow.

Ask

I am inspired but also disturbed by John's words. I feel like I need to learn more about what it means to love others.

Loving Father, help me to love others more today... in every email I send, in anything I post on social media, in the way I speak with my family and friends.

Pause and pray

I think of those who are alone, or just feel alone, right now. Those who are broken-hearted or grieving the loss of someone they loved.

Loving Father, draw near to those who especially need to receive Your love today.

Pause and pray**Yield**

Today, instead of returning to the passage, I reflect on Matthew 28; which reveals the third 'great love' at the heart of Christian discipleship. As I listen to this passage, I open my ears to hear Your word, Lord, and my heart to yield to Your will.

Then Jesus came to them and said... Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Matthew 28:18-20

These words - often described as the 'great commission' - aren't an evangelistic to-do list, but an invitation to join in with God's great compassion for the world. Because God so loved the world He sent His only Son (John 3:16). And now, God's Son is sending His disciples. 'As the Father sent me, so I send you,' he says (John 20:21). Go, love everyone. Love those who have been found. And love those who are still lost. Love them until they are found.

I think of two or three people I know who don't yet know Jesus, and I pray for them now.

Pause and pray**Yielding Prayer**

Jesus, at the start of this new year, I surrender my life once again to your simple, revolutionary call to love others; to love my friends and neighbors, and to love my enemies too; to love those who don't yet know You, and help them find their way to You.

Yielding Promise

I am grateful for the promise in John's first letter that I can truly know and rely on the love that God has for me. (1 John 4:12)

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.

January 03 2021 (click for audio)

Sabbath

Today is Sunday the 3rd of January, and it's the very first Sabbath day of the New Year.

Like every Sunday we are taking 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

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

January 04 2021 (click for audio)

Blessing

It's Monday the 4th of January, and today we embark on a new, six-week season of Lectio 365. Between now and Lent we will meditate on the Beatitudes; the blessings that lay the foundation of Jesus' transformative message: The Sermon on the Mount. Together we will explore how Jesus embodied each of the beatitudes, and how we, at the beginning of this new year, can follow Him and live in a radically different way.

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 every blessing, in this new season I invite you to shape my soul with your words and inspire my life through your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's mercy and goodness today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Mary in the Gospel of Luke...

*'My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.'
Luke 1:46b, 50-53*

Today I am reflecting on the opening words of The Sermon on the Mount - a series of blessings spoken over the most unexpected of people...

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

*He said:
'Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,*

for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,

for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:1-10

I feel blessed. I have a home, food in the fridge, family around me, purpose and provision. Yet, circumstantial comforts like mine aren't the kind of blessing Jesus is talking about. As Jesus launches His manifesto for living, He begins by speaking the generosity and goodness of God over those whose lives seem decidedly un-blessed. It's a surprising and powerful declaration; words of hope with the power to transform. Divine favor for the struggling, the overlooked, the oppressed, the grieving, the hungry and the humble.

Ask

As I think about the beatitudes, do I particularly relate to one of them? Do I feel spiritually poor? Am I grieving? Am I tired of wrestling my ego and inner world into greater humility and surrender to God?

Jesus, help me to receive Your blessing. Help me know Your favor and Your presence. Transform me from the inside out, whatever my circumstance today.

Pause and pray

In the book of Genesis, when Isaac was tricked into giving the blessing meant for his heir, Esau, to his younger son, Jacob, he couldn't take it back. (Genesis 27:30-40). God's blessing could not be undone. I too can ask God to powerfully and irrevocably bless others.

Holy Spirit, bring to mind a friend or family member now; how can I declare the favor of God over them today?

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

He said:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,

for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,

for they will inherit the earth.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 5:1-10*

‘Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing’, writes James. ‘My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?’ (James 3:10-11)

As I join with Jesus, declaring God’s blessing, I am challenged by James’ words. Can I surrender everything I say, not just my prayers, to God? How salty is my speech? Do I need help to tame my tongue?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I confess that I gossip, I lie, I criticize without love and I curse others, and yet, I still expect to speak with Your authority and blessing. I’m sorry; please forgive me. As I meditate on the beatitudes, sanctify my speech. Make my mouth like a fresh spring, bubbling with life-giving water.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me reminds me that, ‘Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.’ (Proverbs 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.*

January 05 2021 (click for audio)

Poor in Spirit

Today is Tuesday the 5th of January, and this week we are meditating on the Beatitudes. Together we will reflect on how Jesus embodied each blessing, and how we can learn from His example to live in a radically different way.

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 every blessing, in this new season I invite you to shape my soul with your words and inspire my life through your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's strength today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 68...

*Tell everyone about God's power.
His majesty shines down on Israel;
his strength is mighty in the heavens.
God is awesome in his sanctuary.
The God of Israel gives power and strength to his people.
Praise be to God!
Psalm 68:34-35*

Today I return to the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount and reflect on the first people to receive Jesus' declaration of God's blessing...

*Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.
He said: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 5:1-3*

The Greek word for 'poor' in this passage describes total destitution; someone who has nothing at all. The two words for 'poor' in Aramaic, the language Jesus would have spoken, refer to someone living in poverty and they can also describe someone who has nothing, but looks to God for everything. Because of this, William Barclay suggests you could reword this beatitude to say, 'Blessed are those who have realized their own utter helplessness, and who have put their whole trust in God.'*

*William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew Volume 1, p105

Ask

Where do I put my trust? In my own ability, in another person, in financial stability or in something else?

Jesus, I am poor in spirit. I am helpless. I confess to You the things I lean on instead of You. Help me learn to trust You more completely.

Pause and pray

The prophet Isaiah says that God lives, ‘...in the high and holy places, but also with the low-spirited, the spirit-crushed...’ (Isaiah 57:15b MSG) I think of someone I know who feels low and crushed. Maybe someone facing unemployment or someone who doesn’t have enough to feed themselves or their family this week. *I bless them and ask You Lord, that they would experience the reality of Your presence with them and Your provision for them today.*

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

He said: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:1-3

I am struck by the similarity of this blessing to the prophecy given centuries before by Isaiah, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.’ (Isaiah 61:1a). In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus declares that He is the Spirit-anointed person Isaiah was talking about (Luke 4:16-21). I wonder if Jesus was thinking of His Isaiah mandate as He proclaimed, ‘the Lord’s favor’, access to the kingdom of God, over the poor in Spirit?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

I welcome You, Spirit of the Sovereign Lord, to fill me again today. Meet me in my own poverty. Teach me to trust You completely. Make my prayers a declaration of Your favor. Mold me into someone who shares and embodies good news for the poor in spirit.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me reminds me that He, ‘... is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. (Psalm 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.

January 06 2021 (click for audio)

Epiphany

It's Wednesday the 6th of January, and today we are pausing our exploration of the beatitudes to join with many in the Western Church in marking the feast of Epiphany. On this day we stop and reflect on the journey of the Magi; the first non-Jewish people to seek out and worship Jesus

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

Jesus, I approach You with the reverence of the Magi. I come to worship my King. Open my eyes to perceive You, realign my mind to believe You, and reawaken my heart to receive You, now and throughout the day to come.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today, declaring God's rule and reign, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 72...

*May he rule from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth...
May the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores
bring tribute to him.
May the kings of Sheba and Seba
present him with gifts.
May all kings bow down to him
and all nations serve him.
Psalm 72:8,10-11*

Pause and pray

Even though my Christmas decorations have been taken down and packed away, today I return one last time to the Christmas story. I reflect on unexpected travelers, seeking a new-born King...

*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'
When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.
'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written:
"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.'"*

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.'

Matthew 2:1-8

Matthew describes three different reactions to the news of Jesus' birth. There's the disturbance felt by the political elite; the Roman appointed King Herod saw Jesus as a direct threat to his throne. Then there's the complacency of the religious leaders; the Chief Priests and experts who had all the needed knowledge but missed the moment of Jesus' arrival. And finally, there's the attentiveness of the outsiders; the Magi who saw the arrival of Jesus signposted in the stars and traveled far to worship Him.

Ask

Can I see some of Herod in myself? Where do I pursue power and influence? Do I struggle with suspicion or jealousy? Who am I threatened by?

Jesus, where am I living for self-promotion, rather than embracing Your self-emptying way of love?

Pause and pray

Can I see some of the religious elite in myself? Am I aware of how God is at work in my life and in my nation or am I too distracted to search?

Jesus, I confess my complacency. Show me the signs of the times so I can pray and act for Your purposes.

Pause and pray

Am I like the Magi? Will I follow Jesus today with a commitment that could take me to other people and places? Am I coming to God for what I can gain, or for what I can give?

Jesus, I bow to You. I worship you with my attention, my time, myself. You are king and I am not. Are you leading me to find You somewhere new today?

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the story of the Magi, I ask You, Holy Spirit, to highlight a word or phrase from their encounter with Jesus...

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Matthew 2: 9-12

The inclusion of these non-Jewish astrologers in the Christmas story, declares that Jesus is not only a Messiah for Israel, but for the whole world. The gifts they bring prophetically foreshadow Jesus' true identity and mission. Gold, riches for a King. Frankincense, incense for a priest, and Myrrh, an embalming oil for someone born to die.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

King Jesus, You have given me everything. All I can give You is myself. Forgive my sin and refine me like pure gold. Teach me to talk with You and let my prayers be like frankincense, rising to Your throne. And anoint me with myrrh. Help me to walk in Your way of self-emptying, laying-down-my-life love today.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me reminds me that, *‘Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.’ (James 1:17)*

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.*

January 07 2021 (click for audio)

Control

Today is Thursday the 7th of January and we are continuing to explore the beatitudes and Jesus' declaration of blessing for those who are poor in spirit. Together we are reflecting on how Jesus embodied His teaching, and how we as His followers can live radically different lives.

Together, each day we will **P.R.A.Y.:** **P - Pause** to be still, **R - Rejoice** with a Psalm and **Reflect** on a passage from the Bible, **A - ask** God to help us and others, and **Y - yield** to His will, come what may.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of every blessing, in this new season I invite you to shape my soul with your words and inspire my life through your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's mercy today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people with the declaration of Psalm 103...

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

Today, as I continue to explore what it means for the poor in spirit to be blessed, I reflect on Jesus' presence at a controversial dinner party...

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'

On hearing this, Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. But go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'

Matthew 9:9-13

Jesus was caught between two very different groups. One, the religious elite who went to great lengths to honor God by attempting to live to the letter of His law. And the other, the Jewish tax collectors, who worked for their Roman oppressors, and were often corrupt and despised by their fellow Israelites. Jesus, the 'doctor', came to cure a terminal illness that affects everyone, including the Pharisees, who were just as 'sick' as the tax collectors. By choosing to follow Jesus, Matthew diagnosed his own condition and sought the cure.

Ask

I'd make a great Pharisee. Part of me would prefer to have rules and a formula to manage my own salvation. Jesus, show me where I am trying to stay in control, where I am striving to earn Your love rather than acknowledging my powerlessness and surrendering to Your gift of grace.

Pause and pray

I think of someone I know whose life choices have excluded them from my community, a little like the tax collectors in this story. Today, I bless them and ask Jesus to meet with them.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'

On hearing this, Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. But go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'

Matthew 9:9-13

Matthew gave up a lucrative (though probably corrupt and ostracizing) career when he chose to follow Jesus. It also seems likely that by following this strange Rabbi that Matthew became materially poorer, but, in Jesus, he gained a new identity, purpose and a different kind of wealth.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord Jesus, help me to own my own weakness. I come to You without pretense or delusion. In my poverty I welcome the wealth of Your grace, Your forgiveness and Your love. No words could ever express my gratitude.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me tells me that, '...because of his great love for [me], God, who is rich in mercy, made [me] alive with Christ even when [I was]

dead in transgressions – it is by grace [I] have been saved, through faith – and this is not from [me], it is the gift of God' (Ephesians 2:4-8)

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.

January 08 2021 (click for audio)

Jim Elliot, Hero of Mission

Today is Friday the 8th of January. Feast of the missionary Jim Elliot who was killed on this day in 1956. On Feast Days we pause from our usual daily rhythm to celebrate the stories and learn from the lives of heroes of faith, whose collective witness embodies our six practices at the heart of Lectio 365. Today therefore we are thanking God for the extraordinary and challenging example of Jim Elliot, a hero who embodied the practice of mission.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today, stirring myself to praise God no matter what my circumstance, 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

Few people have had such an impact in so short a time as Jim Elliot. 65 years ago, today, at just 29 years old, he was martyred. Jim and four friends had traveled to an isolated and notoriously violent Huaorani tribe in Ecuador to share the gospel. Within a week, they were killed by those they came to serve. Jim's wife Elisabeth later published his journal, and its words of passion and commitment to Jesus have inspired many to pursue the great commission, whatever the cost.

Jim Elliot famously said, 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.'*

Jim was a gifted young man who probably could have done many things with his life, and yet he chose a path that many would consider foolish. When was the last time I was called a fool for sharing my faith in Jesus?

When was the last time I experienced a tangible consequence, or made a real sacrifice for the decision to think of others as greater than myself (Phil. 2:3)?

*Warren W. Wiersbe, Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament Wisdom and Poetry, Volume 1, p171

Ask

Jesus, I know I am most like You when I give myself away. Help me to treasure the right things this side of heaven. Show me where I am holding back for fear of appearing foolish?

Pause and pray

Lord, I pray for people serving You, like Jim Elliot did, in dangerous places today. Christians in persecuted contexts, cross-cultural missionaries and more. I name those I know now and ask You to give them courage and resilience to share Your gospel, even when the cost is high

Pause and pray

Yield

Jim Elliot once wrote, 'The world cannot hate us, we are too much like its own. Oh that God would make us dangerous!'"**

**Dave Earley, David Wheeler, Evangelism Is--: How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence, p164

How 'dangerous' am I? Honest answer - not very! How can I live differently today? Remembering Jim Elliot's commitment to Jesus and willingness to surrender everything, I think about the day ahead. What am I willing to risk to share Jesus in my home, with the people I will encounter or even within my online sphere of influence?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Today, I make one of Jim Elliot's prayers my own, 'Father, make of me a crisis [person]. Bring those I contact to decision. Let me not be a milepost on a single road; make me a fork, that [people] must turn one way or another on facing Christ in me.'***

***Mark Whitehead, Dropping Our Nets: Walking in His Footsteps Teacher's Edition, p67

Yielding Promise

As I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me encourages me to, '...Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord [my] God will be with [me] wherever [I] go.' (Joshua 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.

January 09 2021 (click for audio)

Surrender

Today is Saturday the 9th of January, and this is the last day that we will explore Jesus' declaration of blessing over the poor in spirit.

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 every blessing, in this new season I invite you to shape my soul with your words and inspire my life through your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice that God is my inheritance today, 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

Today I am reflecting on a challenging encounter between Jesus and an eager young ruler seeking the keys to the kingdom of God...

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. 'Good teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'
'Why do you call me good?' Jesus answered. 'No one is good – except God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother."'
'Teacher,' he declared, 'all these I have kept since I was a boy.'
Jesus looked at him and loved him. 'One thing you lack,' he said. 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'
At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.
Jesus looked round and said to his disciples, 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!'
Mark 10:17-23

This interaction would have been shocking for the disciples. Tom Wright says it was common for Jews and Pagans to believe that wealth was, 'a sign of God's pleasure,' and honestly, I can make that mistake too.

But Jesus turns this upside down and declares that eternal life, or the Kingdom of heaven, is not about what I have, but how I surrender it to God.

I am a bit like the rich young ruler in this story. There are many things I would prefer to hold onto rather than give up. In his book, *Recovery*, Aaron White writes, 'Poverty of spirit means repenting, laying down our arms and our pride, confessing our desperation to the Creator, and then learning the ongoing character of surrender and humility.'

Ask

Holy Spirit, show me the sin I need to repent of, the things I put my identity and security in that I need to 'lay down'. Teach me to surrender all I am and all I have to You.

Pause and pray

I know people who are sacrificially generous, and I am inspired and challenged by them. I think of them now; those who have surrendered all they have, whether that's a lot or a little, to God. I bless them in the name of Jesus, and I ask You Lord to speak to them about the people and situations You want to release kingdom resources to 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.

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. 'Good teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'

'Why do you call me good?' Jesus answered. 'No one is good – except God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother."'

'Teacher,' he declared, 'all these I have kept since I was a boy.'

Jesus looked at him and loved him. 'One thing you lack,' he said. 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus looked round and said to his disciples, 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!'

Mark 10:17-23

I am captured by a crucial moment in this conversation: 'Jesus looked at him and loved him.' (v21) The context of Jesus' challenge is not disapproval or disappointment... it's love. How does that affect the tone I project onto his words?

I pause and I imagine Jesus looking at me lovingly, right now. From this foundation of favor, what does He want to say?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, I confess that sometimes I hold onto wealth and other things so tightly that I don't make room for You. I surrender all I am, and all I have to You again.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me encourages me: 'For [I] know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for [my] sake he became poor, so that [I] through his poverty might become rich.' (2 Corinthians 8:9)

Closing Prayer

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

January 10 2021 (click for audio)

Rest in the Blessing – A Sabbath Prayer

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

“Sabbath time,” says Wayne Mueller, “assumes that if we step back and rest, we will see the wholeness in it all. We will naturally apprehend the good in how things are, taste the underlying strength, beauty, and wisdom that lives even in the difficult days, take delight in the gift and blessing of being alive.”*

*Muller, Wayne. Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives (p.42). Random House Publishing Group, 2013, Kindle Edition.

In this season of focusing on the Beatitudes, I choose this Sabbath day to rest in the blessings...

Today I rest in the blessing of poverty of spirit. God, I am small, and You are great. I am weak and You are powerful. I have everything I need in You. I rest knowing that it is your good pleasure to give me the kingdom.

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of mourning. I rest in the embrace of the Father of Compassion and the God of all comfort. I know that I can ‘walk all the way into my sadness’** and find Your presence there.

**Ruth Haley Barton. Course notes the Transforming Center

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of meekness. I don’t have to fight to make my own way. Shout to make my voice heard. Jesus, You go before me. You prepare a place for me. I rest knowing that the earth is my Inheritance.

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of hunger. I join with the groaning of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26) and hold my longing for a world where you make all things right and all things new, and give voice to my cry, ‘Come, Lord Jesus.’ (Rev. 22:20)

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of your mercy. ‘Because of Your great love for me, You, who are rich in mercy, made me alive with Christ even when I was dead in transgressions – it is by grace I have been saved’. (Ephesians 2:4-5).

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of purity of heart. Jesus, you have my attention. You have my affection. You have my allegiance.

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of peace-making. Good good Father, you are gathering us, your children together. Prince of Peace, by Your Spirit you are expanding your rule and reign in and through Me.

Pause and pray

Today I even rest in the blessing of being persecuted because of righteousness. ‘I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.’ Philippians 3:10-11

Pause and pray

I pause now and choose one of these blessings to pray over someone I know today.

Pause and pray**Sabbath blessing**

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

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

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

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

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

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

January 11 2021 (click for audio)

Those Who Mourn

It's Monday the 11th of January, and today we continue our new season of Lectio 365 on the Beatitudes; the blessings that lay the foundation of Jesus' transformative message known as the Sermon on the Mount. Together we will explore how Jesus embodied each of the beatitudes, and how we, at the beginning of this new year, can follow Him and live in a radically different way.

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 every blessing, in this new season I invite You to shape my soul with Your words and inspire my life through Your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's lifelong favor, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 30...

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 30:4-5

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on one short sentence from perhaps the most revolutionary message anyone has ever preached....

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them...
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Matthew 5:1-2,4

I want to be happy, but life can be hard. I carry wounds. Sometimes I feel the burden of sorrow. As the proverb says, 'Even in laughter the heart may ache.' (Proverbs 14:13). When I feel low, it's easy to say, 'Cheer up!' or 'Don't worry, be happy!'; but maybe Jesus is saying to me today, 'No. Now is the time to get real – time to acknowledge your grief.'

In mourning I find wholeness, for the Lord draws close to a broken heart.

Ask

Am I in pain? Do I carry wounds? Am I grieving? I ask the Lord to show me what I need to mourn. I invite the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to bring joy in place of my sorrow.

Pause and pray

I think of someone I know who has suffered loss this last year. Perhaps they have lost a partner, a parent, a sister, a brother, or even a child. Perhaps they have lost a job, a relationship, or their health.

Lord, would You come near and comfort them.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them...

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Matthew 5:1-2,4

People often think of the Sermon on the Mount as, 'the essence of Christianity'. But, as Bishop Fulton J. Sheen once wrote, 'let any man put these Beatitudes into practice in his own life and he too will draw down upon himself the wrath of the world... Everybody wants to be happy; but [Jesus'] ways were the very opposite of the ways of the world.' [Fulton J. Sheen, Life of Christ (London: Pan Books, 1969) p131]

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I yield to You all my guilt and grief, my disappointments and sorrows. In the words of the poet John Donne,

Batter my heart, three person'd God; for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to break, blow, burn and make me new.**

** John Donne, Divine Poems XIV 'Batter My Heart'

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in Psalm 34, 'The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.' (Psalm 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.

January 12 2021 (click for audio)

Jerusalem, Jerusalem

Today is Tuesday the 12th of January, and this week we are meditating on the Beatitudes. Together we will reflect on how Jesus embodied the blessings He shared, and how we can learn from His example to live in a radically different way.

Together, each day, we will pray **(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 others and ‘**Y**’: YIELDING to His will in our lives, come what may.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of every blessing, in this new season I invite You to shape my soul with Your words and inspire my life through Your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God’s hope and comfort, joining in the ancient praise of all God’s people in the words of Psalm 10...

Lord, you know the hopes of the helpless.
Surely you will hear their cries and comfort them.
You will bring justice to the orphans and the oppressed,
so mere people can no longer terrify them.
Psalm 10:17-18

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting again on one of the blessings from the Sermon on the Mount; Jesus’ manifesto of the kingdom of God. ‘Blessed are those who mourn,’ Jesus said, ‘for they shall be comforted.’

Just a few days before Jesus was to be crucified, he mourned over the city of Jerusalem...

‘Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”’
Matthew 27:37-39

Jesus knew He had only days to live; but in this moment He wept, not for himself, but for the city He loved. He wept especially for the children. Jesus could see that Jerusalem was standing on the eve of destruction. Within a generation, the Temple would be reduced to rubble, more than a million Jews would be killed by Roman legions*, and many more men, women and children would be enslaved.

* According to Josephus, a first century Jewish scholar, priest and historian

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Flavius-Josephus>

Ask

Jesus, soften my stony heart. Show me what breaks Your heart today. Help me weep with those who weep that I may also rejoice with those who rejoice.

Pause and pray

In the last year, around the world, more than 5 million children under 5 years old died, almost all of them from easily preventable diseases. Every 5 seconds, a child under the age of 15 dies needlessly.**

** Further information: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-survival/under-five-mortality/> and <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2018/09/somewhere-every-five-seconds-a-child-under-15-dies-new-un-report/>

Lord I pray now for the lives of children who are more vulnerable to disease because of where they are born. I pray for medical organizations and charities across the world who are fighting to protect 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.

‘Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”’

Matthew 27:37-39

When Jesus began His mission in a Nazareth Synagogue, He read from Isaiah 61, ‘The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me... 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... They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated.’ (Isaiah 61:1-4)

Lament opens the way for God to come as Comforter; not so that I may be comfortable, but that I may have the strength to rebuild what has been wrecked and destroyed.

Pause and pray**Yielding Prayer**

Lord, I yield myself to Your mission in the world; to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to liberate the captives and comfort all those who mourn.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in Isaiah,

‘You will be called priests of the Lord,
You will be named ministers of our God...
Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion,
And instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance...
And everlasting joy will be yours.’
(Isaiah 61:6-7)

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.

January 13 2021 (click for audio)

Not My Will

Today is Wednesday the 13th of January and we are continuing to explore the Beatitudes and Jesus' declaration of blessing for those who mourn.

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 every blessing, in this new season I invite You to shape my soul with Your words and inspire my life through Your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's unfailing love, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 23...

You prepare a feast for me
in the presence of my enemies.
You honor me by anointing my head with oil.
My cup overflows with blessings.
Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I will live in the house of the Lord
forever.
Psalm 23:5-6

Pause and pray

I return again to a blessing which Jesus pronounced over his followers. They are some of the best loved and also the most dangerous words ever to come from the lips of a preacher: 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.'

Today, I reflect on a moment in the Gospel story where Jesus himself mourns...

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.'
Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'
Matthew 26:36-39

The hymn, 'My Savior's Love' speaks of Jesus' agony in Gethsemane:

'For me it was in the garden,
He prayed: "Not my will, but Thine."

He had no tears for His own griefs,
But sweat drops of blood for mine.' *

* Words and music by Charles Hutchinson Gabriel (1856-1932)

In deep mourning, Jesus interceded for the world; and in great grief He prayed for me. Hebrews 12:2 says, 'For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross...' Jesus was looking forward, through the cross, to the blessing that was on its way.

Ask

The name 'Gethsemane' means 'oil press' – a place where olives are gathered to be crushed. I take a moment to imagine the scene in Gethsemane. I watch Jesus crushed by the sorrow of the world. Am I waiting and watching with Him, or have I fallen asleep?

Pause and pray

For more than a year, the world has been passing through a Gethsemane of sickness and sorrow.

Today, I wait with You, Lord, on behalf of grieving nations, tired doctors, exhausted nurses and other front line workers. Comfort those who mourn. Give strength to the weary and increase the power of the weak. May they soar on wings like eagles; may they run and not grow weary; may they walk and not grow faint. (Isaiah 40:1, 29, 31)

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.'

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'

Matthew 26:36-39

'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' Jesus says, to most of his disciples. But he takes Peter, James and John with him and says, 'Stay here and keep watch with me.'

Am I close enough to Jesus to hear his invitation to watch with Him?

What sorrow might He be asking me to share?

Could I watch and pray with Him for an hour today?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I yield to Your invitation to watch with You, to share in Your grieving, to wait patiently with You, to mourn for the hurt of Your wounded world, and not to hide from the pain of those I meet.

Not my will, but Yours be done.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, I echo Paul's words in 2 Corinthians, 'The God of all comfort... comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.' (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

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.

January 14 2021 (click for audio)

Blessed Are The Meek

Today is Thursday the 14th of January and we are continuing to explore the Beatitudes, Jesus' declaration of blessing for the most unexpected people.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of every blessing, in this new season I invite You to shape my soul with Your words and inspire my life through Your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

I will praise the Lord at all times.
I will constantly speak his praises.
I will boast only in the Lord;
let all who are helpless take heart.
Come, let us tell of the Lord's greatness;
let us exalt his name together.
I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me.
He freed me from all my fears.
Psalm 34:1-4

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on another surprising blessing which Jesus announced in his revolutionary Sermon on the Mount....

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them...
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Matthew 5:1-2,5

In 1966, New York musician and singer, Paul Simon, wrote a song which he recorded with Art Garfunkel,

'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit
Blessed is the lamb whose blood flows
Blessed are the sat upon, spat upon, ratted on.' *

*Paul Simon, 'Blessed', from the album Sounds of Silence

Words like these could start a revolution. The advertising industry doesn't think like this. The global economy

doesn't work like this. The world says, 'Blessed are the fighters, the climbers, the go-getters, the jet-setters'. Jesus, the Lamb of God, calls me to a better way.

Ask

Jesus, show me where I have been molded by the values of the culture around me and not by the upside-down values of the Kingdom You came to bring.

Pause and pray

Many people are feeling uncertain and insecure right now. National economies are shaking. I name someone I know whose life and livelihood is being badly affected. May Your kingdom come, Your will be done, in them.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them...

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:1-2,5

Meekness isn't weakness. A meek person assumes a posture of humble trust that can stand firm in the face of trouble. A meek person is gentle, courteous, and kind to other people, but, man, can they be tough!

It was in a spirit of meekness that, on the 1st of December 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in the African American section of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Her action sparked a movement to end racial segregation in America.

Meekness isn't weakness; it is strength under control.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I yield to Your grace. Help me to choose meekness. Help me to resist the temptation to throw my weight around; to remember that life is not all about me.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in Psalm 37,

'Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him and he will do this:
he will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.'
(Psalm 37:5-6)

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.

January 15 2021 (click for audio)

Easy Yoke

Today is Friday the 15th of January and we are continuing to explore the blessings of Jesus, known as the Beatitudes. Together we are reflecting on how Jesus embodied these blessings, and how we as His followers can live radically different lives.

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 every blessing, in this new season I invite You to shape my soul with Your words and inspire my life through Your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in the confident trust I can have in God, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 37...

Trust in the Lord and do good.
Then you will live safely in the land and prosper.
Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you your heart's desires.
Psalm 37:3-4

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting again on one of the surprising blessings which Jesus used to describe what the kingdom of God is like. 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.'

Life for Jesus' twelve disciples wasn't easy. For a start, Jesus was always on the go, moving from town to town, preaching the message. But He was training them to find rest even in their busyness.

'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

The good news is that Jesus promises me rest. But then He says, 'Take my yoke upon you'. In Jesus' day a yoke was what a farmer used to connect two oxen to a plough to make sure they walked together in the same direction and at the same speed. A yoke sounds like an added burden, but the yoke isn't mine, it's His. If I am yoked, the one who is gentle and humble (or as some Bible translations put it, 'meek and lowly'), then it is going to change the pace at which I walk - and I will find rest for my soul.

Ask

Am I weary? Exhausted? Am I too busy to even notice?

Jesus, I invite You into my tiredness. Teach me to walk at Your pace.

Pause and pray

Who do I know who is anxious, busy, stressed, troubled or weary? 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.

‘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

The Native American Hopi language has a word to describe life out of balance. They call it, ko-yaa-nis-qatsi. It also means ‘crazy life’, ‘life in turmoil’, ‘life disintegrating’, or ‘a state of life that calls for another way of living’*. In the midst of a life in turmoil, Jesus offers His disciples another way of living – the unhurried, gentle way of meekness that will inherit the earth.

* From the 1982 film, Koyaanisqatsi, directed by Godfrey Reggio

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord Jesus, I yield to Your pace. Help me to step out of my anxious hurry and into Your gentle yoke. I hear Your invitation to, ‘Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it.’ Lord, help me to learn Your ‘unforced rhythms of grace.’ (Matthew 11:29 MSG)

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in Psalm 23,

‘The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet waters,
He refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake.’
(Psalm 23:1-3)

Closing Prayer

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

January 16 2021 (click for audio)

Little Donkey

Today is Saturday the 16th of January, and this is the last day that we will explore Jesus' declaration of blessing for the meek.

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 every blessing, in this new season I invite You to shape my soul with Your words and inspire my life through Your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

The Lord is righteous in everything he does;
he is filled with kindness.
The Lord is close to all who call on him,
yes, to all who call on him in truth.
He grants the desires of those who fear him;
he hears their cries for help and rescues them.
Psalm 145:17-19

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting again on one of the surprising blessings which Jesus spoke about as He described the upside-down kingdom of God: 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.'

As Jesus enters Jerusalem to be welcomed as King, the animal He is riding is not the usual mount of choice for someone seeking to impress a crowd...
As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.'
This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:
'Say to Daughter Zion, "See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."
Matthew 21:1-5

Go almost anywhere in the world and walk the streets of a city, and you are likely to see one kind of statue endlessly repeated. As pastor and writer, Brian Zahnd, says, everywhere you go, 'there's always some dude on a horse.* The 'dude' is almost always a military hero – a general or a king, acclaimed as great because of his success in battle.

Jesus is not like that. 'Your king comes to you, gentle' – the Greek word also means 'meek' – 'and riding on a

donkey.'

* <https://brianzahnd.com/2020/06/theres-always-some-dude-on-a-horse/>

Ask

Am I expecting Jesus to show up like 'some dude on a horse'? Or am I ready to welcome and follow the meek and gentle One who comes riding on a donkey?

Pause and pray

Jesus, Your Church has sometimes strayed from trusting Your way of meekness. We can be tempted to put our hope in other powers to fight our battles. I pray for my church now. Forgive us when we haven't looked to You.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.'

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

'Say to Daughter Zion, "See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Matthew 21:1-5

Jesus needs donkeys not horses. A donkey is an awkward, ordinary creature – lumbering and gentle. The 17th century French monk, Brother Lawrence, was a lay brother who worked for decades in a monastery kitchen. In the unimpressive and ordinary business of life he learned to practice the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I yield to Your invitation to be one of your donkeys. To embrace being unimpressive. To make space for the gentle power of Your presence with me in the ordinary moments of my day.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in Psalm 23,

'Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.'

(Psalm 23:4)

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.

January 17 2021 (click for audio)

Rest in the Blessing – A Sabbath Prayer

It's Sunday the 17th of January. This week we have been exploring Jesus' blessings for the meek and for those who mourn. Today, we leave our weekday rhythms behind and pray in a simpler way, on this day of rest.

'Sabbath time,' says Wayne Mueller, 'assumes that if we step back and rest, we will see the wholeness in it all. We will naturally apprehend the good in how things are, taste the underlying strength, beauty, and wisdom that lives even in the difficult days, take delight in the gift and blessing of being alive.'*

*Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*(Random House Publishing Group, 2013, Kindle Edition) p42

In this season of focusing on the Beatitudes, I choose this Sabbath day to rest in the blessings...

Today I rest in the blessing of poverty of spirit. God, I am small and You are great. I am weak and You are powerful. I have everything I need in You. I rest knowing that it is Your good pleasure to give me the kingdom.

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of mourning. I rest in the embrace of the Father of Compassion and the God of all comfort. I know that I can 'walk all the way into my sadness'** and find Your presence there.

**Ruth Haley Barton, the Transforming Center, course notes.

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of meekness. I don't have to fight to make my own way. Shout to make my voice heard. Jesus, You go before me. You prepare a place for me. I rest knowing that the earth is my inheritance.

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of hunger. I join with the groaning of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26) and hold my longing for a world where you make all things right and all things new, and give voice to my cry, 'Come, Lord Jesus.' (Rev. 22:20)

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of your mercy. 'Because of Your great love for me, You, who are rich in mercy, made me alive with Christ even when I was dead in transgressions – it is by grace I have been saved'. (Ephesians 2:4-5)

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of purity of heart. Jesus you have my attention. You have my affection. You have my allegiance.

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of peacemaking. Good, good Father, you are gathering us, your children together. Prince of Peace, by Your Spirit you are expanding your rule and reign in and through me.

Pause and pray

Today I even rest in the blessing of being persecuted because of righteousness. 'I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.' Philippians 3:10-11

Pause and pray

I pause now and choose one of these blessings to pray over someone I know today.

Pause and pray**Sabbath blessing**

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

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

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

May I know grace to embrace my own finite smallness

in the arms of God's infinite greatness.

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

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

January 18 2021 (click for audio)

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, Hero of Justice

We're taking a break from our season on the Beatitudes to celebrate the life of Dr Martin Luther King Jr, a true human hero of mercy and lover of righteousness. He personified the Beatitudes in every way.

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 rejoice in God's love with the words of today's Psalm...

But I am like an olive tree, thriving in the house of God.

I will always trust in God's unfailing love.

I will praise you forever, O God,
for what you have done.

I will trust in your good name
in the presence of your faithful people.

Psalm 52:8–9

Pause and pray

Martin Luther King Jr was born on the 15th of January 1929 in what was then the segregated south of the United States of America.

His childhood and teenage years were difficult in many ways, and he had doubts about Christianity's claims, but he eventually became convinced that the Bible had 'many profound truths which one cannot escape', and so he trained to become a Baptist minister.

Martin Luther King Jr is perhaps best known for leading the civil rights movement in America. While others such as Malcolm X and the Brotherhood of Islam advocated for violent protest, King called for transformation through non-violence and civil disobedience. In 1964, aged just 35, he won the Nobel Peace Prize for his civil rights work. Four years later, while standing on the balcony of a motel, he was shot and killed for the same reason.

In August 1963, a year before he won the Nobel Peace Prize, King led a quarter of a million people on The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, he delivered a 17-minute speech to the huge crowd, and as he reached the end of it, the gospel singer, Mahalia Jackson, who was sitting behind him, shouted, 'Tell them about the dream!'

It's possible that this is what prompted Martin Luther King Jr to depart from his script and declare the revolutionary words, 'I have a dream...'

‘Even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream,’ he said.

His dream was that his nation would live out the truth that everyone is created equal. His dream was that people, those who had suffered and those who had caused the suffering, would eventually be able to sit at a table together. His dream was that places where injustice had taken place would become places of freedom. His dream was that people would ‘not be judged by the color of their skin but the content of their character.’*

*King, Martin Luther. “I Have a Dream by Martin Luther King, Jr; August 28, 1963.” The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/mlk01.asp.

His dream is as relevant and compelling today as it was in 1963.

Ask

Martin Luther King Jr’s speech, and his life’s work, led to the American Civil Rights Act of 1964, which became the foundation for resolving racial disputes, promoting equal opportunities in employment, and the desegregation of schools, parks and other public facilities.

‘All people are created equal,’ he said, and he was right. However, not all people are treated equally. This is still a reality today. In our society, people are still judged for the color of their skin, their gender, their education, where they come from, who they support... and this happens in our local schools and universities, on our sports fields and down our streets.

Martin Luther King’s dream has not come true... yet.

It’s easy for me to point the finger at others, to recognize racism and other forms of unjust judgment in others, but I ask You, Holy Spirit, to test me and try me. Show me what is in my heart. Forgive me for judging others.

Pause and pray

As I think about my church, my local community, and in particular the schools in my area, who is experiencing inequality? Who is being judged, excluded, or treated unfairly simply because of who they are?

I ask You, God, to intervene, to change hearts and minds. And I also ask You to help me to be a peacemaker, and not just a peacekeeper. Help me to act justly, to do the right thing, even if it costs me.

Pause and pray

Yield

The day before he was shot and killed, Martin Luther King Jr gave an extraordinary (some say prophetic) speech of yielding:

‘Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.’

**

**MLKEC, INP, Martin Luther King, Jr. Estate Collection, In Private Hands, NYC-4A & 4B

Pause and pray**Yielding Prayer**

Father God, I don't know what will happen tomorrow. I may have difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter. I want to do Your will today.

Closing Prayer

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

January 19 2021 (click for audio)

Holy Dissatisfaction

Today is Tuesday the 19th of January, and we are continuing to meditate on the beatitudes, the blessings that lay the foundation for Jesus' transformative message, known as 'the Sermon on the Mount'.

Together we are exploring some of the ways that Jesus taught and embodied each of the beatitudes, and how we can follow him and live in a radically different way.

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 every blessing, in this new season I invite you to shape my soul with your words and inspire my life through your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*Your unfailing love, O Lord, is as vast as the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your justice like the ocean depths.
You care for people and animals alike, O Lord.
How precious is your unfailing love, O God!
All humanity finds shelter
in the shadow of your wings.
Psalm 36:5-7*

As I think about the crowds listening to Jesus preach I can imagine their surprise and perhaps consternation as he declares his blessing on those who might normally have been overlooked or swept to the edges: The poor in spirit. Those who mourn. The meek. I wonder if his listeners were, as it were, on the edge of their seats? Who is he going to bless next?

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them...

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

/ *Matthew 5:1,2-6*

Author and theologian Cathy Deddo has this to say about righteousness:

'What is righteousness? ...Righteousness is having all things set right. When there is righteousness in the world then all things will be in right relationship with one another and will be living and acting according to its created purpose. To desire righteousness in ourselves is to desire that we are living in line with who we were created to be and not in rebellion to it. Jesus says here that one who is hungering for righteousness is blessed. This means that these people are those who ache to see things made right, in all places.' *

* Cathy Deddo - trinity study centre http://www.trinitystudycenter.com/mount/matthew_5-5-6.php

Ask

What is my created purpose? Am I living and acting according to it or in rebellion against it - or more likely, a bit of both? God, in the quiet I invite you to remind me of who I am and whose I am. If I've wandered away from your love and your good plans for me, would you set my heart and my footsteps again towards home?

Pause and pray

God, I declare blessing over all of those who ache to see things made right, in all places. For those I know who look both inside themselves and around at a hurting world and groan and yearn in holy dissatisfaction. Bless them as they hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them...

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Matthew 5:1,2-6

I sit in my hunger, in my dissatisfaction for a moment. I feel my longing 'For more of God than I am experiencing right now.' ** More experience of God in me. More evidence of God at work in the world. In this space I allow my groaning and my hunger to join the groaning of all Creation. (Romans 8:22).

** Ruth Haley Barton - Transforming Community Lecture Notes

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Maranatha. Come Lord Jesus. Meet me, meet us, meet the world in our groaning, in our emptiness, in our longing to see all things made right, in all places. I receive the blessing of hunger and the promise to be filled.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in Revelation 21, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"' (Revelation 21:3-5)

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.

January 20 2021 (click for audio)

Savor the Sweetness

Today is Wednesday the 20th of January and this week we continue to consider the Blessing for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

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 every blessing, in this new season I invite you to shape my soul with your words and inspire my life through your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's righteousness today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 85:9-11

*Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,
so our land will be filled with his glory.
Unfailing love and truth have met together.
Righteousness and peace have kissed!
Truth springs up from the earth,
and righteousness smiles down from heaven.
Psalm 85:9-11*

In today's passage from the book of John, I reflect on Jesus' longings and their fruition:

*...His disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."
But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."
Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"
"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."
John 4:31-34*

Before this passage, Jesus has just finished a long conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. In that encounter, he reminds her of her created purpose. imagine how satisfying that would have been for Jesus - the sweetness of her repentance and the sweetness of the anticipation of a life and a community transformed. I can see him in my mind's eye leaning back and saying, 'Yep, I could eat that for breakfast, lunch and dinner!'

Ask

I think about those moments when I've either seen or been a part of God restoring someone's heart and life. I hold that person, that situation in my mind and remember the beauty of God's redemptive work, and I savor it's sweetness and I give thanks.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for those working on the front line of very fractured situations with very broken people. Perhaps addiction counselors or those who work among vulnerable children. God, as You are at work in them and

through them, would you help them to celebrate each breakthrough, no matter how slight? Would you help them to savor the sweetness of every small success? I name those I know, and bless them, as they hunger and thirst for Righteous.

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.

*Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."
But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."
Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"
"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."
John 4:31-34*

Aaron White, in his brilliant book on the Beatitudes, says this, 'Jesus's perfection stems not from his disregard for the body or from immunity to human passions, but from directing all his desires toward their true and proper end: right relationship with the Father, with others, and with creation... Jesus's righteousness is found in his love of the Father above all else. This loving submission grounds and orients all of Jesus's life and ministry. He knows whose son he is, and he knows that he is loved, so he knows how he is called to live.'*

* White, Aaron. Recovering (Pastoring for Life: Theological Wisdom for Ministering Well) (p. 105). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, may I continually remember that I am your child and that I am loved. Remind me today and always how I am called to live. And by your invitation and by your grace, may I love you above all else.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in Psalm 37, 'I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.'
(Psalm 37:25)

Closing Prayer

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

January 21 2021 (click for audio)

Undeserved Mercy

Today is Thursday the 21st of January, and this week we are continuing to explore the Blessings of the Beatitudes and the radical way of Jesus.

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 every blessing, in this new season I invite you to shape my soul with your words and inspire my life through your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's mercy today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 116...

*Then I called on the name of the Lord:
"Please, Lord, save me!"
How kind the Lord is! How good he is!
So merciful, this God of ours!
The Lord protects those of childlike faith;
I was facing death, and he saved me.
Psalm 116:4-6*

Jesus has been blessing the hungry, those dissatisfied with the status quo of their broken hearts and a broken world. He turns to the merciful.

*Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.
"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."
Matthew 5:1-2,7*

The Downtown Eastside is by far the most devastated community I have ever seen in a first world country. This neighborhood in Vancouver, Canada is six blocks by six blocks and inhabited by 10,000 drug addicts. My friend Aaron White and his family have lived, loved and served there for a decade and a half. They were inspired by the tradition of the Salvation Army, and it's founder, William Booth, who has famously said:

*'You don't demand a certificate of virtue before you drag drowning people out of the water, or the assurance that the man has paid his rent before you deliver him from the burning building.'**

* William Booth, "Original Speech by Salvation Army Founder William Booth," Salvation Army North, YouTube video, June 27, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DK5IqxQmVHs>. 2. Brad Jersak, "Our glorification".

In his book, *Recovering*, Aaron says:

Mercy is scandalous... We all like to think we are merciful, but we also tend to have well-developed moral screens to separate the "worthy" from the "unworthy." People threatened to boycott the Salvation Army one

year for sending Christmas care packages...to people in prison. The vitriol that was poured out on prisoners, and on those who dared to spend any resources on them, was bone-chilling.**

**White, Aaron. Recovering (Pastoring for Life: Theological Wisdom for Ministering Well) (p. 117). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Ask

Do I separate out those who are worthy to receive mercy and those who are not? Am I unconsciously categorizing those who deserve your help and those who don't? Lord I repent. May I see the way that You see and love the way that you love. For my own arrogance and judgmental spirit, I pray:

Lord have mercy
Christ have mercy
Lord have mercy

Pause and pray

In the quiet I think about those who I have thought beyond your reach, your saving love and help. Maybe pimps and pedophiles. Agents of genocide. Corrupt politicians. I name them before you now and over each one I quietly pray:

Lord have mercy
Christ have mercy
Lord have Mercy

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

Matthew 5:1-2,7

Aaron goes on:

"God does not just tolerate us. We all come to God in our mess, in need of mercy, and he does not just hold his nose and refrain from destroying us. Mercy is not our defense against God's anger; it is Jesus actively pouring out his life and hope for us...God does not hate us, and he does not leave us to founder in our trouble."***

*** White, Aaron. Recovering (Pastoring for Life: Theological Wisdom for Ministering Well) (p. 119). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate expression of both his hunger for righteousness and his love of mercy. Jesus did not leave us alone in our trouble - He actively poured out his life for us, even though we didn't deserve it.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, may I be an agent of your scandalous love and mercy toward all who don't deserve it - which includes me. I receive your mercy. I yield myself to your grace, and I am blessed.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, I am grateful that the Lord who loves me says in Matthew 5, 'He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.' (Matthew 5:35)

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.

January 22 2021 (click for audio)

Lord, if You Are Willing

Today is Friday the 22nd of January, and this week we are continuing our exploration of mercy and the radical way of Jesus.

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 every blessing, in this new season I invite you to shape my soul with your words and inspire my life through your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's mercy today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 67...

*May God be merciful and bless us.
May his face smile with favor on us.
May your ways be known throughout the earth,
your saving power among people everywhere.
May the nations praise you, O God.
Yes, may all the nations praise you.
Psalm 67:1-3*

The sermon is over, but the crowds still follow Jesus, even when he comes down the mountain. Sure, He can talk the talk, but will He practice what He preaches?

*When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."
Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."
Matthew 8:1-4*

I wonder if earlier the leper had been at the fringe of the crowd, straining to hear from a distance as Jesus preached? I wonder if Jesus' words about mercy were ringing in his ears as he knelt, tremblingly, before him?

What a poignant prayer, 'Lord, if you are willing.'

It's important to note that the superstitions of the day would have dictated that the leper's illness was a result of his own sin. Not only was he unclean, but deservedly so.

Ask

Where do I feel unclean? Unworthy of God's scandalous mercy? I reach to the deepest crevices of my heart and my memory and take hold of the worst thing I have ever done. And in the quiet, I kneel before you and pray, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.'

Pause and pray

God, I proclaim blessed all those who feel that they are beyond the reach of your grace. For those who feel they are so far gone, so unclean and defiled, that they could never enter your presence. Reach out your hand. Touch them. May they hear your voice say to them, "I am willing - be clean." In the quiet, I name specific ones before you now and hold them in your merciful Love.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I read this passage again, I imagine myself in the story. I picture the azure Mediterranean sky, the scrub clumped on the hillside, the glassy expanse of the Sea of Galilee ribboned by a pebbled beach. Am I part of the following crowd? One of the disciples? Am I the leper? Or am I, like Jesus, extending a hand of help and healing?

*When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."
Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."
Matthew 8:1-4*

The power of a gentle human touch, the breaking of the barriers between clean and unclean. The life and the love of God flowing through to bring healing to body, soul and spirit. Mercy incarnated in a person. Sometimes the scandalous love and beauty of Jesus takes my breath away.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

King of mercy, today I receive all that I do not deserve. You are willing. You make me clean. Thanks be to God. May your mercy make its home in me so that I can welcome others into its warmth.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me reminds me in Hebrews, that we can, 'approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.' (Hebrews 14:6)

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.*

January 23 2021 (click for audio)

Mercy Triumphs

Today is Saturday the 23rd of January, and this our final reflection on the Blessings on those who hunger for righteousness and for the merciful

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 every blessing, in this new season I invite you to shape my soul with your words and inspire my life through your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*The Lord gives righteousness
and justice to all who are treated unfairly.
He revealed his character to Moses
and his deeds to the people of Israel.
The Lord is compassionate and merciful,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.
Psalm 103:6-8*

Today I am reflecting on a moment in Jesus' life where his hunger for righteousness and his love of mercy combined in surprising and beautiful ways.

*The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.
But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"
"No one, sir," she said.
"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."
John 8:3-11*

There are a lot of things wrong in this scenario. Treachery. Adultery. Misogyny. Thuggery. How on earth is Jesus going to sort out the mess and bring righteousness - make the wrong things right? What does mercy look like in this explosive and complex situation?

Ask

God, I bring before You complex situations in my life. Where I don't know how to unravel the tangle of my own brokenness - where I'm feeling vulnerable and exposed. Perhaps even where others are exploiting my weakness for their own agenda! In the quiet, I ask for your wisdom and I listen.

Pause and pray

God, I ask your forgiveness as a church for all the times we have gotten it wrong as we try to navigate our love for righteousness and our need for mercy. God, I name my church; would you purify our motives? Would you show us the stone in our own hands, help us let it go, and to lean into your mercy for ourselves and for others?

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I imagine where I might find myself in the story. Am I the woman, caught red handed and trembling? Do I have a stone in my hand? Or am I writing in the dust?

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

John 8:3-11

Jesus exposes the unrighteousness of the mob and extends mercy to the woman. In both instances they are invited to walk the path of righteousness, to make the wrong things in their lives right. In the words of the Apostle James, "mercy triumphs over judgment." James 2:13

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I am in need of your mercy. I repent of those times I have allowed judgment to triumph over mercy. With gratitude, I receive your mercy today and I step onto the path of righteousness.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in Exodus 33, 'I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.' (Exodus 33:19)

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.

January 24 2021 (click for audio)

Rest in the Blessing – A Sabbath Prayer

Today is Sunday the 24th of January. Today we leave our usual P.R.A.Y rhythms behind and pray in a simpler way on this day of rest.

“Sabbath time,” says Wayne Mueller, “assumes that if we step back and rest, we will see the wholeness in it all. We will naturally apprehend the good in how things are, taste the underlying strength, beauty, and wisdom that lives even in the difficult days, take delight in the gift and blessing of being alive.”*

* Muller, Wayne. Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives (p. 42). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

In this season as I am focusing on the Beatitudes, I choose this Sabbath day to rest in the blessings...

Today I rest in the blessing of poverty of spirit. God, I am small and You are great. I am weak and You are powerful. I have everything I need in You. I rest knowing that it is your good pleasure to give me the kingdom.

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of mourning. I rest in the embrace of the Father of Compassion and the God of all comfort. I know that I can ‘walk all the way into my sadness’** and find Your presence there.

**Ruth Haley Barton. Course notes the Transforming Center.

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of meekness. I don’t have to fight to make my own way. Shout to make my voice heard. Jesus, You go before me. You prepare a place for me. I rest knowing that the earth is my inheritance.

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of hunger. I join with the groaning of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26) and hold my longing for a world where you make all things right and all things new, and give voice to my cry, ‘Come, Lord Jesus.’ (Rev. 22:20)

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of your mercy. ‘Because of Your great love for me, You, who are rich in mercy, made me alive with Christ even when I was dead in transgressions – it is by grace I have been saved’. (Ephesians 2:4-5)

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of purity of heart. Jesus you have my attention. You have my affection. You have my allegiance.

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of peacemaking. Good, good Father, you are gathering us, your children together. Prince of Peace, by Your Spirit you are expanding your rule and reign in and through me.

Pause and pray

Today I even rest in the blessing of being persecuted because of righteousness. ‘I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.’ Philippians 3:10-11

Pause and pray

I pause now and choose one of these blessings to pray over someone I know today.

Pause and pray

Sabbath blessing

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

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

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

May I know grace to embrace my own finite smallness

in the arms of God's infinite greatness.

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

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

January 25 2021 (click for audio)

The Pure Heart

Today is Monday the 25th of January, and we are continuing to meditate on the beatitudes, the blessings that lay the foundation for Jesus' transformative message, known as 'the Sermon on the Mount'.

Together we are exploring some of the ways that Jesus taught and embodied each of the beatitudes, and how we can follow him and live in a radically different way.

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 every blessing, in this new season I invite You to shape my soul with Your words and inspire my life through Your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today, taking a moment to proclaim the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 113...

Praise the Lord!
Yes, give praise, O servants of the Lord.
Praise the name of the Lord!
Blessed be the name of the Lord now and forever.
Psalm 113:1-2

Today I return again to reflect on the words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount...

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them...
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Matthew 5:1-2,8

Jesus is speaking to a crowd of people who are accustomed to following strict rules and regulations to purify themselves and become right with God. Everything from what they ate, to how they did business, to when they rested was spelled out in the books of the law.

In one sentence, Jesus turns everything upside down. He proclaims a new way of encountering God that does not rely upon outward actions or rule following. Instead, it is about examining the attitudes and motivations of the secret, inner place of the heart.

Ask

Am I trying to make myself right with God by my external actions? Am I trying to prove myself 'good' or 'worthy' by what I do; or in comparison to what others do?

Lord, I invite You, in the words of Psalm 139 to 'Search me God, and know my heart' (Ps 139:23).

Pause and pray

God, I bless Your Church today and name the communities and congregations I know locally. In a world that is so focused on outward appearances, and in the midst of online broadcasting and social media influence, purify our hearts so that we are focused solely on 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.

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them...

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Matthew 5:1-2,8

I can't purify my own heart - I've tried. No amount of doing or striving will accomplish the task. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes that, 'The only way to have a pure heart is to realise you have an impure heart...'* It is only when I give up trying to cover up, when I acknowledge my need for God's help, that I can be transformed from the inside out.

* Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones, Studies on the Sermon on the Mount (Volume 1) p108.

Jesus, I am so grateful that because of Your life, Your death and Your resurrection, I can say that, 'it is by grace [I] have been saved, through faith – and this is not from [myself], it is the gift of God.' (Ephesians 2:8)

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, today I acknowledge that I need You. I yield to Your transformation in my life with the words of Psalm 51:

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

Yielding Promise

Thank You God, for your promise in Ezekiel that, 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.' (Ezekiel 36:26)

Closing Prayer

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

January 26 2021 (click for audio)

The Reconciled Heart

Today is Tuesday the 26th of January and we are continuing to meditate on the beatitudes: the blessings that lay the foundation for Jesus' transformative message, known as 'the Sermon on the Mount'.

Together we will pray (**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 others and '**Y**': YIELDING to His will in our lives, come what may.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of every blessing, in this new season I invite You to shape my soul with Your words and inspire my life through Your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

Everywhere—from east to west—
praise the name of the Lord.
For the Lord is high above the nations;
his glory is higher than the heavens.
Psalm 113:3-4

Today I am reflecting on the meaning of the beatitude, 'Blessed are the pure in heart' (Matt. 5:8) and how Jesus' teaching within the Sermon on the Mount explores this theme within my relationships...

If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.
Matthew 5:23-24

God's plan for humanity was always community. But the messy reality is that things don't always go to plan. Relationships become fractured, even broken. The challenge when this happens is that Jesus doesn't just kindly suggest it could be a good idea to fix them. He commands it as a prerequisite of my worship.

My heart cannot be reconciled to God unless it is reconciled with others.

Ask

How is my heart today? Am I holding any bitterness, negativity, or unforgiveness towards someone I know?

Lord, I invite You to show me. Purify my heart. Is there anything you'd like me to do to courageously step out in reconciliation today?

Pause and pray

Where is there division in my community? Is there bitterness, negativity or unforgiveness within my family, among friends, or between racial or religious groups?

Today, I name these tensions and pray a blessing over my community. Help us not only be reconciled to one another, but to also be agents of change and ministers of reconciliation in a fractured and hurting World

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.

If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

Matthew 5:23-24

In the next chapter of Matthew, Jesus says, 'For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.' (Matthew 6:14-15) Challenging words! Jesus suggests that there is a connection between my willingness to let go of offense and the desire to punish others, and my openness to receive God's gift of forgiveness and see more clearly who He is.

Jesus' kingdom vision is a community who are collectively pursuing purity of heart through confession, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I am so thankful that Your vision for reconciliation is so much bigger and more beautiful than my own. Today I invite You to transform my relationships and community for Your glory. Purify my heart so that I can, 'bear with others and forgive... as You have forgiven me.' (Colossians 3:13 paraphrased)

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in 2 Corinthians that He, 'reconciled [me] to himself through Christ,' through the victory Jesus won over sin. The Lord has included me in, 'the ministry of reconciliation.' (2 Cor 5:18)

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.

January 27 2021(click for audio)

The Humble Heart

Today is Wednesday the 27th of January, and this week we are continuing to explore Jesus' proclamation of blessing for the pure in heart.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of every blessing, in this new season I invite You to shape my soul with Your words and inspire my life through Your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's intimacy to me, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 116...

I love the Lord because he hears my voice
and my prayer for mercy.
Because he bends down to listen,
I will pray as long as I have breath!
Psalm 116:1-2

Today I am continuing to explore the challenges of the heart in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount...

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.
Matthew 6:1-4

In just a few sentences, Jesus has exposed one of the biggest idols I face; being approved of and appreciated by others. Every day, I read news stories glorifying the generous, highlighting the honorable, celebrating celebrity. But the way of Jesus is actively set against popularity culture. He calls me to practice the very opposite of what the human heart often desires. I am called to serve in secret, for the glory of God, alone.

Ask

Whose attention am I hoping to attract? Who do I want approval from today? Perhaps a family member, a friend, a tutor or a colleague.

God, I confess that sometimes, my good deeds come from selfish motives. Lord, purify my heart. Who can I secretly serve, today?

Pause and pray

I name and bless the young adults I know and ask You Lord to free them from the oppression of others' opinions and the appeal of earthly appreciation. Help them fix their hearts and eyes on 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.

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 6:1-4

William Barclay writes about the great paradox of Christian reward: 'Those who calculate that it is due to them do not receive it; those whose only motive is love, and who never think that they have deserved any reward, do in fact receive it'. *

*William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew p210

Is God inviting me into a new spiritual discipline of secret service, kindness and generosity?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Father, I give You my heart and my motives; purify them so that I can serve from a place of love. My status is found only in You. I yield myself to You alone.

Yielding Promise

I am thankful today for Your promise in Philippians that, '...it is God who works in [me] to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.' (Phil 2:13)

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.

January 28 2021 (click for audio)

Thomas Aquinas, Hero of Learning

Today is Thursday the 28th of January, feast day of the theologian and priest Thomas Aquinas.

On Feast Days we pause from praying the Bible to celebrate the stories and learn from the lives of heroes of faith, whose collective witness embodies our six practices at the heart of Lectio 365. Today therefore we are thanking God for the extraordinary example of Thomas Aquinas, a legendary hero of learning.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's unfailing love and faithfulness today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 117...

Praise the Lord, all you nations.
Praise him, all you people of the earth.
For his unfailing love for us is powerful;
the Lord's faithfulness endures forever.
Psalm 117:1-2

Pause and pray

Born in thirteenth-century Italy, Thomas Aquinas joined the Dominican Religious Order in his early twenties. Today he is recognized as one of the greatest theologians of the Middle Ages. Thomas taught that reason can lead us to believe in 'a God', but only revelation can show us God as He really is.

Thomas Aquinas once wrote: 'Three things are necessary for the salvation of man: to know what he ought to believe, to know what he ought to desire, and to know what he ought to do.'

For Aquinas, right beliefs were insufficient. Right beliefs and right action were also insufficient. It is the transformation of our desires – the inner orientation of our hearts, tied with belief and action – that are demonstrations of the life of God within us.

Ask

God, reveal Yourself to me the way You really are. I invite You not only to change my mind, but also my affections and my actions. In this time of quiet, I invite You to make me new again today.

Pause and pray

Who around me struggles to line up head, heart and hands? I pray for them now. God, would You integrate us so that we would be holy and wholly given over to You

Pause and pray

Yield

Aquinas is also famous for saying, 'The things we love tell us what we are.' In the quiet, I think about the things that are first and foremost in my heart.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I hold the things I love before You. I thank You for every good gift You have placed in my life, and I receive them with joy. And God, I give them all back to You. May they take their rightful place in my affections.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says that my, '... hope does not put [me] to shame, because God's love has been poured out into [my] heart through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to [me].' (Romans 5:5)

Closing Prayer

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

January 29 2021 (click for audio)

The Childlike Heart

Today is Friday the 29th of January, and this week we are continuing to explore Jesus' proclamation of blessing for the pure in heart.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of every blessing, in this new season I invite you to shape my soul with your words and inspire my life through your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's faithfulness today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 118...

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

Let all Israel repeat:

"His faithful love endures forever."

Let Aaron's descendants, the priests, repeat:

"His faithful love endures forever."

Let all who fear the Lord repeat:

"His faithful love endures forever."

Psalm 118:1

Today I am reflecting on the words of Jesus in the book of Matthew. Yet again, Jesus offers some pretty surprising truths about childlike purity of heart...

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."

Matthew 18:1-5

Mark's Gospel tells me that the disciples were arguing about which one of them was greatest (Mark 9:33-37). Their question seems to have come from a place of comparison and competition. Jesus responded by presenting them with a small child who was unqualified, inexperienced and of little resource or status; someone who was completely dependent on others. The message is clear, if I'm consumed with getting ahead, with being and doing better than others, then I've misunderstood the heart of God's kingdom and the character of its King.

Ask

Who do I compare myself to? How do I compete with others? What effect does it have on my relationship with them and with God?

Jesus, I'm sorry. I let my insecurities and ambitions get the better of me. Help me to see You as You truly are. Help me to trust You and Your unearned love; to be more like a little child.

Pause and pray

Who are the people around me who follow God with a childlike, trusting faith?

Father, I name them and bless them with a fresh awareness of Your presence. I ask that You will strengthen their faith, joy and purity of heart. Help me to learn from 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.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.'

Matthew 18:1-5

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians, beautifully describes how Jesus' embraced lowliness...

'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...' (Philippians 2:3-9)

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, I thank You that Your love for me is unconditional and unwavering. I surrender my self-interest and my desire to compete or compare myself to others. Today I choose to trust You and follow You into humility, service and obedience.

Yielding Promise

Today, Lord, I praise You for your promise of faithfulness in Psalm 116:

*'The Lord protects those of childlike faith;
I was facing death, and he saved me.' (Ps 116:6 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.

January 30 2021 (click for audio)

The Sacrificial Heart

Today is Saturday the 30th of January, and this is the last day this week that we will reflect on Jesus' blessing over the pure in heart.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of every blessing, in this new season I invite You to shape my soul with Your words and inspire my life through Your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in this brand-new day, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 118...

This is the day the Lord has made.

We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 118:24

Today I am reflecting on one of the most radical examples of generosity, found in the gospel of Mark...

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few pence.

Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.'

Mark 12:41-44

I find the language in this passage so interesting – the contrast between the rich people who just '*threw in* large amounts' and the widow, who - I like to imagine - very carefully, '*put in* two very small copper coins'.

Lord, I examine my heart today. Am I carelessly throwing just a portion of my money, time or even my heart towards You? Am I fulfilling the function of giving without much thought or personal cost? Or like the widow, am I carefully, intentionally and sacrificially giving my all?

Ask

Lord, I ask that You would purify my heart today; that You would help me to give my whole self to You, instead of just the things that are convenient or easy.

Pause and pray

God, I bless the materially poor; especially those whose financial challenges are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. I speak Your blessing over widows and widowers; those affected by homelessness; those who fall through the cracks of government support. Help them to put their trust in You. I name those I know now, and I ask You to meet their Needs

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.

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few pence.

Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.'

Mark 12:41-44

In the book of Matthew, Jesus challenges me that, 'Where [my] treasure is, there [my] heart will be also' (Matt 6:21). What do I treasure?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I offer my all to You. You are my treasure. I ask that You continue to purify my heart; that I could see You as You truly are.

Yielding Promise

Today, God, I praise You for Your promise in James that when I submit to You, that You respond by drawing near to me. (James 4:7-8)

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.

January 31 2021 (click for audio)

Rest in the Blessing – A Sabbath Prayer

It's Sunday the 31st of January. Today we leave our usual P.R.A.Y. rhythms behind and pray in a simpler way, on this day of rest.

Sabbath time," says Wayne Mueller, "assumes that if we step back and rest, we will see the wholeness in it all. We will naturally apprehend the good in how things are, taste the underlying strength, beauty, and wisdom that lives even in the difficult days, take delight in the gift and blessing of being alive.'*

*Muller, Wayne. Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives (p. 42). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

In this season, as I focus on the Beatitudes, I choose this Sabbath day to rest in the blessings...

Today I rest in the blessing of poverty of spirit. God, I am small and You are great. I am weak and You are powerful. I have everything I need in You. I rest knowing that it is your good pleasure to give me the kingdom.

Today I rest in the blessing of mourning. I rest in the embrace of the Father of Compassion and the God of all comfort. I know that I can 'walk all the way into my sadness'** and find Your presence there.

** Ruth Haley Barton. Course notes the Transforming Center.

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of meekness. I don't have to fight to make my own way. Shout to make my voice heard. Jesus, You go before me. You prepare a place for me. I rest knowing that the earth is my inheritance.

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of hunger. I join with the groaning of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26) and hold my longing for a world where You make all things right and all things new, and give voice to my cry, 'Come, Lord Jesus.' (Rev. 22:20)

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of your mercy. 'Because of Your great love for me, You, who are rich in mercy, made me alive with Christ even when I was dead in transgressions – it is by grace I have been saved'. (Ephesians 2:4-5).

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of purity of heart. Jesus, You have my attention. You have my affection. You have my Allegiance

Pause and pray

Today I rest in the blessing of peace-making. Good, good Father, You are gathering us, Your children together. **Prince of Peace, by Your Spirit You are expanding Your rule and reign in and through me.**

Pause and pray

Today I even rest in the blessing of being persecuted because of righteousness. 'I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.' (Philippians 3:10-11)

Pause and pray

I pause now and choose one of these blessings to pray over someone I know today.

Pause and pray

Sabbath blessing

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

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

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

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

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

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