

LECTIO 365 Day Prayers

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

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

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

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

July 2021

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Audio for Each Day in MP3 Format

[Month of July 2021](#)

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

July 01 2021 (click for audio)

The Crowded Cave

Today is Thursday the 1st of July, and this week we are reflecting on how we hold on to God, and receive His care in the midst of earth-shaking experiences.

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

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You, and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice; my eyes see Your goodness; and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 57...

*My heart is confident in you, O God;
my heart is confident.
No wonder I can sing your praises!
Wake up, my heart!
Wake up, O lyre and harp!
I will wake the dawn with my song.
Psalm 57:7-8*

Pause and pray

So far this week I have been reflecting on the Prophet Elijah who was threatened by Israel's Queen, fled for his life and hid in a cave. Today, I'm in another cave with David; a young man prophesied to be the next King of Israel, fleeing for his life from the current King Saul...

*David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered round him, and he became their commander. About four hundred men were with him.
1 Samuel 22:1-2*

Elijah was alone and isolated in his cave on Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:1-18). But David's cave experience was very different. When David hid in the cave of Adullam (which means refuge), his family and a ragtag crew of outsiders joined him.

When I'm stressed or distressed, sometimes I feel God draw near to me, a little like He did with Elijah. But at other times God's presence comes in the form of the people He sends. These people become His listening ears, His embracing arms, His wisdom and comfort.

Ask

God, I think now of the people You have used in my life to bring Your comfort, wisdom, strength and support when I have needed it most. I give thanks for them now.

Pause and pray

God, I often put myself in the place of the hero in a story. Today, I surrender center-stage and take the place of David's family and followers. Who do I know who needs Your comfort, wisdom, strength and support? I pray for them now. In what way can I go to them or help 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.

David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered round him, and he became their commander. About four hundred men were with him.

1 Samuel 22:1-2 (NIV UK)

There was a big gap between David being anointed as the next King of Israel (1 Sam. 16), and the day he took the throne (2 Sam. 5). Yet here in this cave, surrounded by the people God has sent to him, David begins to live out God's leadership plan for his life. And he does this before He receives Israel's recognition.

What has God spoken over my life? Am I waiting for the recognition or permission of others to start living it out?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I yield to Your plans and Your will for my life. I want to start living it out now. Open my eyes to the people You've put around me and show me how I can serve and encourage them today.

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:

So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
Isaiah 41:10 (NIV UK)

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.

July 02 2021 (click for audio)

Catherine and William Booth: Heroes of Justice

Today is Friday the 2nd of July, the Feast of the pioneers Catherine and William Booth, who on this day in 1865, through preaching the Gospel in London, England began the work that would lead to the establishment of the Salvation Army.

On Feast Days like today, we celebrate the stories and learn from the lives of heroes of faith, whose collective witness embodies the six practices at the heart of Lectio 365. These are: loving God through Prayer and Creativity, loving others through Justice and Hospitality, and loving the world through Learning and Mission.

Today, therefore, we are thanking God for the extraordinary example of Catherine and William Booth, heroes of justice.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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 mercy and mission today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 86...

*O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive,
so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help...
All the nations you made
will come and bow before you, Lord;
they will praise your holy name.
For you are great and perform wonderful deeds.
You alone are God.
Psalm 86:5,9-10*

Pause and pray

William Booth grew up in Nottingham, England in the mid 19th century. He found faith early and was an active Methodist, drawn to street preaching. As a teenager he apprenticed in a Pawnbroker's shop and was disturbed by the poverty he witnessed.

Catherine Mumford was raised a dedicated Christian with a commitment to personal holiness. An avid reader and thinker, Catherine was immediately impressed by the young preacher William Booth.

Married in 1855, Catherine and William were a force to be reckoned with. Together they dedicated their lives to bringing the transforming power of the gospel to the people who needed it most.

On this day, in 1865, outside The Blind Beggar pub in London, William Booth began preaching to crowds of people. This work would lead to many being saved and to the founding of The Christian Mission, later renamed The Salvation Army.

As William and Catherine shared the message of Jesus in a way ordinary people could understand and relate to, their work grew. Despite criticism and opposition from people who disagreed with their methods, the Booths welcomed everyone, especially people who felt rejected or unwelcome in more traditional churches.

Catherine Booth once said, 'To better the future we must disturb the present.'*

In the early years of The Salvation Army, William, Catherine and others caused many 'disturbances'...

In a time when women were often not permitted to teach, Catherine disturbed social and theological norms by preaching and seeing people saved alongside her husband.

Catherine and William disturbed the business world when they campaigned for safer working conditions for suffering workers in matchstick factories. They even provided better employment by launching their own brand of matches, 'Lights in Darkest England'.

The Booths disturbed the hidden sex industry of their day. They worked with a journalist to expose how easy it was to traffic vulnerable young women; and protested in parliament demanding change.

William and Catherine Booth noticed injustice, pain and struggle in the lives of the people around them and they did something about it.

Ask

I am deeply challenged by Catherine's words, 'To better the future we must disturb the present.'*
What does this mean for me today? What needs to be disturbed in my life to set God's direction for my future?

*Nealson Mun and David Collinson, *Insane: the Stories of Crazy Salvos Who Changed the World*, pg 2.

God, I ask You to show me.

Pause and pray

Where is there injustice, pain and struggle in my nation?

God, I ask You to disturb me. Help me not to walk on by or look the other way. Move my heart and inspire my mind – what role can I play in Your plans for the people affected by this issue

Pause and pray

Yield

On May 9th, 1912, William Booth spoke these stirring words in his final address to thousands of Salvationists,

*'While women weep as they do now, I'll fight;
while little children go hungry as they do now, I'll fight;
while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight;
while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there
remains one dark soul without the light of God I'll fight – I'll fight to the very end!'***

*** Neilson Mun and David Collinson, Insane: the Stories of Crazy Salvos Who Changed the World, pg 186.*

Three months later, William Booth was 'promoted to glory'. Over a century after his death, William's words inspire Christians from many streams of the Church and capture the heart of The Salvation Army who continue to work in over a hundred nations today.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I want to dedicate my life to others, just like the Booths. I know that I am too attached to my own comfort and concerns, so disturb me Lord. Open my eyes to the injustice, pain and struggle around me. Equip me to take the transforming power of the gospel to the people who need it most.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in Matthew 25,

...whatever [I do] for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, [I do] for [Jesus].
Matthew 25:40

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.

July 03 (click for audio)

The Cry of Confidence

Today is Saturday the 3rd of July and it's our last day exploring what we can learn from the prayers of Elijah and David; how we can call on God in overwhelming circumstances.

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

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You, and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice; my eyes see Your goodness; and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's protection today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 144...

*Praise the Lord, who is my rock...
He is my loving ally and my fortress,
my tower of safety, my rescuer.
He is my shield, and I take refuge in him...
Psalm 144:1-2*

Pause and pray

Earlier this week I reflected on David running for his life from King Saul and hiding in the cave of Adullam. Today I meditate on a prayer, written by David from a cave...

*When my spirit grows faint within me,
it is you who watch over my way.
In the path where I walk
people have hidden a snare for me.
Look and see, there is no one at my right hand;
no one is concerned for me.
I have no refuge;
no one cares for my life.
I cry to you, Lord;
I say, 'You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living.'
Listen to my cry,
for I am in desperate need;
rescue me from those who pursue me,
for they are too strong for me.*

*Set me free from my prison,
that I may praise your name.
Then the righteous will gather about me
because of your goodness to me.
Psalm 142:3-7 (NIV UK)*

David hid in more than one cave during his life, but it is possible that this Psalm was written in the cave of Adullam. David was confident that God was going to hear and respond to his prayer - 'You are my refuge' he says. If he was in the cave of Adullam then God did answer David's prayer: 400 men joined him in that cave and David was eventually anointed as King.

Maybe it was experiences like this that meant David could one day say to his son Solomon, 'Be strong and courageous... Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you...' (1 Chron. 28:20)

Ask

What has my life and my experiences taught me about God's love?

Holy Spirit, remind me of the times I have experienced God's peace, provision or protection. The situations where God has not failed or forsaken me.

Pause and pray

David sounds desperate in this Psalm. I think of those who may be feeling really desperate today. It is estimated that nearly 800,000 people take their own lives every year. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in 15-24 year olds around the world.*

* <https://save.org/about-suicide/suicide-facts/>

God, I pray for people in my community who are feeling desperate and wrestling with suicidal thoughts. Maybe, like David, they feel alone and out of options. I declare now that, 'You are [their] refuge, [their] portion in the land of the living.'(v. 5)

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage I listen for a particular word or phrase that the Holy Spirit is highlighting to me today...

*When my spirit grows faint within me,
it is you who watch over my way.
In the path where I walk
people have hidden a snare for me.
Look and see, there is no one at my right hand;
no one is concerned for me.
I have no refuge;
no one cares for my life.*

*I cry to you, Lord;
I say, 'You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living.'
Listen to my cry,
for I am in desperate need;
rescue me from those who pursue me,
for they are too strong for me.
Set me free from my prison,
that I may praise your name.
Then the righteous will gather about me
because of your goodness to me.
Psalm 142:3-7 (NIV UK)*

I wonder whether the time David spent hiding and praying in caves was more formative than he realized at the time? David experienced God's protection, he learned to trust in God's timing, and at his most vulnerable he received God's comfort. When David finally took the throne of Israel, his experience had taught him who was sovereign over his life.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

King Jesus, You are my sovereign. I begin this day, on my knees, pledging my life (again) to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in another of David's Psalms that:

*Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me...
Psalm 23:4a*

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.

July 04 2021 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Prayer

It's Sunday the 4th of July, happy Independence Day to those praying with us in the USA! This week we've been continuing our After the Fire Series exploring the lives of Elijah and David; learning how to encounter God's presence in the earth-shaking moments in our lives.

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

Ruth Haley Barton says that keeping the Sabbath, '...honors the body's need for rest, the spirit's need for replenishment, and the soul's need to delight itself in God for God's sake'*

* Ruth Haley Barton, The Road We Must Travel, A Personal Guide for Your Journey (Worthy publishing, 2004)

Lord, I bring my body before You for rest and restoration. I lift my Spirit to You for replenishment and refreshment. And I still my soul to wait in Your presence, on this day of rest,

Pause and pray

On this Sabbath, I return to Elijah's story, reflecting on how God met both his spiritual and physical needs:

[Elijah] looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again.

Then the angel of the Lord came again and touched him and said, "Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you."

1 Kings 19:6-7 (NLT)

Where in my life do I need God's physical provision – sustenance, energy or strength - today?

Father, I invite You, Jehovah-jireh – God who provides – to give me what I need.

Pause and Pray

Where in my life do I need to invite the spiritual refreshment of the Holy Spirit today?

Holy Spirit, I invite You to fill me, again.

Pause and Pray

What 'journey' is ahead of me that I need to be sustained for? What awaits me in the coming days?

Jesus, I invite You to provide refreshment today. Prepare me to follow You in the journey ahead.

Pause and Pray

I pause and ground these prayers by praying for someone I know who also needs God's provision, refreshment or direction Today.

Pause and pray

I pray a prayer of gathering and releasing, by preacher and poet Ted Loder:

*'Oh God, gather me now to be with you
as you are with me.*

*Soothe my tiredness;
quiet my fretfulness;
curb my aimlessness;
relieve my compulsiveness;
let me be easy for a moment.*

*O Lord, release me
from the fears and guilts which grip me so tightly;
from the expectations and opinions which I so tightly grip,
that I may be open
to receiving what you give,
to risking something genuinely new,
to learning something refreshingly different.*

*O God, gather me to be with you
as you are with me'. ***

*** Ted Loder, Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle, p76*

As I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming Sabbath day, I breathe slowly, and repeat the words of Psalm 119, making them my prayer:

*'Let your love, God, shape my life'
Psalm 119:41*

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, www.petegreig.info

July 05 2021 (click for audio)

The Gentle Whisper of God

Today is Monday the 5th of July, and we are continuing our After The Fire series, which follows the story of Elijah after his dramatic encounter with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. This week, we are exploring what happened when Elijah heard a 'still small voice'.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice, my eyes see Your goodness, and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's protection today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 107...

*"Lord, help!" they cried in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress.
He calmed the storm to a whisper
and stilled the waves.
What a blessing was that stillness
as he brought them safely into harbor!
Psalm 107:28-30*

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on what happened to Elijah at Mount Horeb. God had told him to 'stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by' (1 Kings 19:11, NIV/UK).

The wind and earthquake came, but God wasn't in either of them...

After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.'

The Lord said to him, 'Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus.

1 Kings 19:12-15a

God sometimes speaks in dramatic ways, through earthquakes and wind and fire. But on this occasion, 'the Lord was not in the fire'.

The great Baptist preacher, C.H. Spurgeon says that, 'God brought his presence before Elijah – he needed an encounter with God - but first, God had to show him where he was not.'*

*<https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/where-is-the-god-of-elijah/#flipbook/>

The Hebrew phrase for 'a gentle whisper' is 'kol d'mama daka' and it literally means 'a voice of sheer or thin silence'. On this occasion, perhaps to Elijah's surprise, God wasn't in the earthquake, the wind or the fire. But then, out of the thin silence, God spoke.

Ask

I pause once again and take a deep breath: in and out. What can I hear around me, outside of me? What can I hear inside – in my mind and in my heart - too?

I take a few moments to become aware of the thin silence of God's presence with me.

Pause and pray

People often suffer in silence; I think of those who have been silenced by pain and trauma during the Coronavirus Pandemic. Those who have suffered anxiety and ill health, those who have lost loved ones, those who have lost jobs and found themselves in terrible debt.

Draw near to them, Loving God. Into their silence, I ask You to speak.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.'

The Lord said to him, 'Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus.

1 Kings 19:12-15a

Elijah was fearful and fragile. He desperately needed reassurance after the drama and the trauma that he had experienced. Knowing this, and with great tenderness and compassion, God came and spoke to him in a gentle whisper.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Heavenly Father, I'm not particularly comfortable with silence. I fill my days with activity and noise because it's when things are quiet that I realize just how fearful and fragile I am. I bring this all to You now, and I yield to Your 'relentless tenderness'**, fully revealed to me in Jesus.

**Brennan Manning, 'Abba's Child: The Cry Of The Heart For Intimate Belonging

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in Luke's Gospel that:

*'because of the tender mercy of our God,
...the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.'
Luke 1:78-79*

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.

July 06 2021 (click for audio)

A Quiet Voice

Today is Tuesday the 6th of July, and we are continuing our After the Fire Series, which follows the story of Elijah after his dramatic encounter with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. This week, we are exploring what happened at Mount Horeb, where Elijah heard a 'still small voice'.

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

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice, my eyes see Your goodness, and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's attentiveness today, 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!
Death wrapped its ropes around me;
the terrors of the grave overtook me.
I saw only trouble and sorrow.
Then I called on the name of the Lord:
"Please, Lord, save me!"
Psalm 116:1-4*

Pause and pray

Today, I am reflecting on Eugene Peterson's version of Elijah's encounter with God on Mount Horeb, as paraphrased in The Message Bible. A great wind had come and gone, but God was not in it...

*...after the wind an earthquake, but God wasn't in the earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but God wasn't in the fire; and after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper.
When Elijah heard the quiet voice, he muffled his face with his great cloak, went to the mouth of the cave, and stood there. A quiet voice asked, "So Elijah, now tell me, what are you doing*

here?" Elijah said it again, "I've been working my heart out for God, the God-of-the-Angel-Armies, because the people of Israel have abandoned your covenant, destroyed your places of worship, and murdered your prophets. I'm the only one left, and now they're trying to kill me." God said, "Go back the way you came through the desert to Damascus."
1 Kings 19:12-15a (MSG)

When Sir Christopher Wren designed St Paul's Cathedral in London, he didn't realize that he had created an auditory marvel as well as an architectural one. Thirty meters above the floor, directly beneath the huge, free-standing dome, is the Whispering Gallery. Even when the Gallery is crowded with people, if someone leans their face against the wall and whispers, another person leaning against the opposite wall, thirty-three meters away, will hear the whisper clearly.

Ask

I try to ignore the 'crowded Gallery' of my life for a few moments, and I imagine myself leaning in, listening for God's whisper. What might God be whispering to me today?

Pause and pray

I think of those who are daring to lean in and whisper a desperate prayer today, perhaps people who don't even know if there is a God out there listening; the grieving mother, the young person who feels like they can't take it anymore, the businessman bordering on bankruptcy.

Loving God, may Your whisper reach them in a miraculous way today. Speak words of life to them.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

...after the wind an earthquake, but God wasn't in the earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but God wasn't in the fire; and after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper. When Elijah heard the quiet voice, he muffled his face with his great cloak, went to the mouth of the cave, and stood there. A quiet voice asked, "So Elijah, now tell me, what are you doing here?" Elijah said it again, "I've been working my heart out for God, the God-of-the-Angel-Armies, because the people of Israel have abandoned your covenant, destroyed your places of worship, and murdered your prophets. I'm the only one left, and now they're trying to kill me." God said, "Go back the way you came through the desert to Damascus."
1 Kings 19:12-15a (MSG)

Eugene Peterson mentions the quietness of God's voice three times in this short passage. It's like he's trying to make a point. It doesn't matter how 'noisy' I feel my life is right now, whether that's the noise of the circumstances around me, or the noise of the anxieties and questions within me; God's quiet voice can still be heard.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Loving God, You are far more attentive to my whispered prayers – including all of the selfish ones – than I am of Your whispered replies. I yield all the stuff that I want to say today, and I lean in and listen instead.

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 116 that God:

...bends down to listen, [and so] I will pray as long as I have breath.

Psalm 116:2

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to live this day to the full,

being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,

being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost,

proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.

Amen.

July 07 2021 (click for audio)

Hearing God

It's Wednesday the 7th of July, and we are continuing our After The Fire series. Throughout this week, we are exploring what happened at Mount Horeb where Elijah heard a 'still small voice'. Today, we are also considering Adam and Eve's response when they heard the voice of God in the Garden of Eden.

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

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice, my eyes see Your goodness, and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's irresistible goodness today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 42...

*As the deer longs for streams of water,
so I long for you, O God.
I thirst for God, the living God.
When can I go and stand before him?
Psalm 42:1-2*

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God had given them clear instructions about the Garden, and when Adam and Eve ate the fruit that God had told them not to, they felt ashamed.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'
He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.'
Genesis 3:8-10

When Adam and Eve heard God speak in the Garden of Eden, they hid in shame. I think about how others in the Bible responded to hearing God's voice. When Samuel heard God speak in the night, he was confused and thought it was Eli calling him (1 Samuel 3:4-5). When Sarah heard God say that she would bear a son, she laughed in disbelief (Genesis 18:12). But when Elijah heard God speak, even

though it was just a whisper, he got up and walked to the mouth of the cave, ready to listen (1 Kings 19:13).

Ask

What would it mean for me to 'go out and stand at the mouth of the cave' in readiness today? Where could I go to make time and space to listen to God?

Pause and pray

I think of someone who, like Adam and Eve, has done something that they are deeply ashamed of; something that hangs over them like a dark cloud; and they are now hiding from God.

Father God, help them to believe in Your love and to receive Your grace and forgiveness. Heal them and restore them completely.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'
He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.'
Genesis 3:8-10 (NIV/UK)

One of the things that people sometimes ask about 24-7 Prayer Rooms is, 'Do I have to go to a room to pray?' The answer, of course, is no. God is everywhere, omnipresent, and I can pray anywhere, anytime.

However, as in the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and as in the story of Elijah in the cave, the God who is everywhere sometimes appears somewhere. Sometimes, God is present in a particular place and time. And often, it's because God wants to meet with someone in a particular way.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord God, I am excited about meeting with You today. Open my ears to hear Your invitation, and open my eyes to see You when You appear, especially if it is a way that I might not expect. I yield to You today.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in James's letter that when I:

Come near to God... he will come near to [me].

James 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.

July 08 2021 (click for audio)

The Glory of God

Today is thursday the 8th of July, and we are continuing our After The Fire series. Throughout this week, we are exploring what happened when Elijah encountered God at Mount Horeb. Today, we are considering what happened when Moses encountered God in the same place.

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

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice, my eyes see Your goodness, and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's awesome majesty today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 29...

*The voice of the Lord echoes above the sea.
The God of glory thunders.
The Lord thunders over the mighty sea.
The voice of the Lord is powerful;
the voice of the Lord is majestic.
The voice of the Lord splits the mighty cedars;
the Lord shatters the cedars of Lebanon.
Psalm 29:3-5*

Pause and pray

Today, I am reflecting on Moses's encounter with God at Mount Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai, 600 years before Elijah arrived on the same mountainside. Moses was tending a flock of his father-in-law's sheep when he spotted a bush that had caught fire.

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush,
'Moses! Moses!'
And Moses said, 'Here I am.'
'Do not come any closer,' God said. 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.' Then he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.
Exodus 3:4-6

God is gentle, tender and compassionate, like a mother (Isaiah 66:13). But God is also awesome and holy. When Moses realizes that he is speaking with God in the burning bush, he immediately covers his face in fear. And then years later, on that same mountain once again, having received the Ten Commandments, Moses asks to see God's glory. 'You cannot see my face,' God replies, 'for no one may see me and live. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by.' (Exodus 33:20, 22)

Perhaps Elijah was aware of these encounters as 'he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.' (1 Kings 19:12)

Ask

I try to imagine the awesomeness, the holiness of God, for a moment. Creator of a billion trillion stars (Psalm 8). Sustainer of all things (Colossians 1:17).

I ask You, Lord, to show me just a tiny glimpse of Your glory today.

Pause and pray

Mount Horeb is in the Sinai Peninsula, which is part of Egypt. As I think about the surrounding nations of the Middle East, I name those that come to mind: Iran, Lebanon, Morocco, Turkey, Israel, and others too.

Lord Jesus, I choose one of these nations now, and I ask You to reveal Your glory to all those who are seeking You there.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush,
'Moses! Moses!'

And Moses said, 'Here I am.'

'Do not come any closer,' God said. 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.' Then he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

Exodus 3:4-6

The awesomeness of God is a strong theme in the book of Job too. At one point Job offers a long list of God's creative activity; 'He spreads out the... skies.' 'He suspends the earth over nothing.' 'He wraps up the water in clouds.' 'He marks out the horizon... a boundary between light and darkness.' And all of this, Job concludes, 'are but the outer fringe of his works; how faint the whisper we hear of him!' (Job 26)

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Holy God, I am in awe of You. I know but a whisper of who You are and what You do. 'I look up at your macro-skies, dark and enormous, your handmade sky-jewelry, moon and stars mounted in their settings. Then I look at my micro-self and wonder, Why do you bother with me? Why take a second look my way?' (Psalm 8:3-4, MSG) And yet, You do bother, You do care. I yield to You, Holy God, Loving Father.

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 145 that:

*The Lord is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.
Psalm 145:9*

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.

July 09 2021 (click for audio)

George Schmidt, Hero of Mission

It's Friday the 9th of July. Regular users of this app will know that we sometimes pause from our usual rhythm to celebrate the stories and learn from the lives of heroes of faith – people whose collective witness embodies our six practices at the heart of Lectio 365. These are: Prayer and Creativity, Justice and Hospitality, Learning and Mission. So today we are thanking God for the extraordinary example of George Schmidt, a brave hero of mission.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I rejoice in God's reign today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 47...

*For God is the King of all the earth;
sing to him a psalm of praise.
God reigns over the nations;
God is seated on his holy throne.
The nobles of the nations assemble
as the people of the God of Abraham,
for the kings of the earth belong to God;
he is greatly exalted.
Psalm 47:7–9*

On this day in 1737, 26 year old Moravian missionary George Schmidt arrived on the shores of Cape Town, South Africa.

George moved to Baviaanskloof, or 'The Valley of Baboons', and set up the first Protestant mission station in Southern Africa. He built himself a home and planted a pear tree in his new garden. George befriended and educated a small group of displaced Khoi people, and taught them to farm so they wouldn't go hungry. After five years of educating the community and sharing his faith, George baptized the first new follower of Jesus.

News of the baptism upset some in the State Church. The scrutiny Schmidt came under, and the

opposition to his mission that followed, led to his departure from South Africa in 1744, just 6 years after his arrival.

What must it have been like for George Schmidt to leave? I wonder if he felt like he'd failed? After all, what would become of those few Khoi Christians that he left behind?

50 years later, after Schmidt had died, a new generation of Moravian missionaries returned to South Africa to find out.

In his book, *The Lord of the Ring*, Phil Anderson writes, 'On arriving back at Baviaanskloof in 1792, the three missionaries soon located the ruin of Schmidt's original house. In the garden, to their amazement, stood a giant pear tree - the results of the tiny shoot that Schmidt had planted. Even greater surprises were in store. They soon made the acquaintance of an old woman named Magdalena. On finding out who they were, she introduced herself as one of the original believers who had been baptized 50 years previously. The light of faith still burned in her heart, and for half a century this remarkable woman had nurtured and led the indigenous church which Schmidt had founded. She drew out a small leather bag and asked if her daughter could read something from the New Testament. They listened astonished as this second-generation native believer read to them from a Bible given by Schmidt five decades earlier.'*

*Phil Anderson, *The Lord of the Ring*, p149-150

This remarkable story reminds me of a parable Jesus once told.

'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produced corn - first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. As soon as the corn is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.' (Mark 4:26-29)

Ask

George Schmidt did not have to be present for the sapling he'd planted to grow into a pear tree. Nor did he need to be in South Africa for the Gospel seed he'd sowed to grow into a thriving church. God had been present, sustaining and growing the first shoots of life.

What seeds have I sown in the lives of others? Are there people I've talked with about Jesus who I haven't seen in a long time? Lord, I trust that You are the source of life. Grow those seeds in the lives of those who come to mind today.

Pause and pray

The next generation of Moravian missionaries continued George Schmidt's work developing a self-sufficient, literate agricultural community with a strong spiritual life. Within a decade, the governor of the region was so impressed with the impact of Baviaanskloof, 'The Valley of Baboons', that he renamed it 'Genadendal', which means 'Valley of Grace'.

Who is the Church serving in my community? Lord, I pray for that work now and I ask You to make our area a valley of Your Grace.

Pause and pray

Yield

Phil Anderson writes, 'In 1995, in recognition of its remarkable history, Nelson Mandela change the name of the official residence of the President of South Africa from "West Brook" to "Genadendal". In making the announcement he expressed a desire that the office of the President should also be "under God's grace".' **

**Phil Anderson, The Lord of the Ring, p150

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I will go wherever the seeds of Your gospel need to be sown. I surrender to Your preparation, direction and mobilization today – even if, like George Schmidt, it involves a change in geography.

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 that wherever I am called to go, I am not alone. God promises to always be with me, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.

July 10 2021 (click for audio)

Go Back

Today is Saturday the 10th of July, and we are continuing our After The Fire series, which follows the story of Elijah after his dramatic encounter with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. This week, we have been exploring what happened at Mount Horeb, where Elijah heard a 'still small voice'.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice, my eyes see Your goodness, and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in the many examples of God's goodness today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 143...

*I remember the days of old.
I ponder all your great works
and think about what you have done.
I lift my hands to you in prayer.
I thirst for you as parched land thirsts for rain.
Come quickly, Lord, and answer me...
Psalm 143:5-7a*

Pause and pray

For the final time this week, I am reflecting on Elijah's encounter with God at the mouth of the cave at Mount Horeb. Today, I am particularly interested in their conversation...

*After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.
Then a voice said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'
He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.'
The Lord said to him, 'Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus.
1 Kings 19:12-15a*

One of the peculiar things in this story is the repetition. Twice in 1 Kings 19 God asks Elijah, 'What are you doing here?' After the first time, Elijah complains about Israel's failure to be faithful and says that he's the only one left. In response, God sends the wind, the earthquake, the fire, and then a gentle whisper, before asking the question again, 'What are you doing here?'

Perhaps God was giving Elijah a chance to see things a little differently? But no, Elijah repeats his complaint word for word. And so God tells him to 'Go back the way [he] came.' Retrace your steps, Elijah. Remember where you came from.

Ask

I take a few moments to 'go back the way I came', to retrace a little of my journey, to remember times of God's encouragement and guidance. What might God want to remind me about, and maybe even restore to me?

Pause and pray

As I think about the Coronavirus Pandemic, and its deadly impact on so many nations around the world, I feel overwhelmed. Like Elijah, I find myself repeating the same prayers over and over, and I am ashamed by how small my faith is sometimes.

God, You are a mighty savior! (Zephaniah 3:17, NLT) I lift my eyes to You today, and I ask You to heal the nations. I choose to trust that my mustard seeds of faith are enough to move mountains.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.'

The Lord said to him, 'Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus.'

1 Kings 19:12-15a

For Elijah, 'going back the way he came' led to all sorts of new things, including the anointing of two kings, Hazael and Jehu. It also eventually resulted in the appointing of his successor, Elisha, who received a 'double portion' (2 Kings 2:9, NIV/UK) of the prophetic anointing that was on Elijah.

When God says to 'go back' it's almost always a way of 'going forwards'.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord God, sometimes I feel overwhelmed by my circumstances and I lose perspective. I find it hard to see, pray or act with faith. I'm sorry – please forgive me and restore me, like You did Elijah. I surrender control to You once again. Your ways are always better than my ways.

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 42:

*[God] will lead [me] down a new path,
guiding [me] along an unfamiliar way.
[God] will brighten the darkness before [me]
and smooth out the road ahead of [me].
Isaiah 42:16 (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.

July 11 2021 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Prayer

It's Sunday 11th of July and this week, as part of our After The Fire series, we've been exploring how we, like Elijah, can encounter God's presence in stillness and silence.

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

Ruth Haley Barton says that keeping the Sabbath, '...honors the body's need for rest, the spirit's need for replenishment, and the soul's need to delight itself in God for God's sake'*

* Ruth Haley Barton, The Road We Must Travel, A Personal Guide for Your Journey (Worthy publishing, 2004)

Lord, I bring my body before You for rest and restoration. I lift my Spirit to You for replenishment and refreshment. And I still my soul to wait in Your presence, on this day of rest.

Pause and pray

On this Sabbath, I return to Elijah's story, reflecting on how God met both his spiritual and physical needs:

[Elijah] looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again.

Then the angel of the Lord came again and touched him and said, "Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you."

1 Kings 19:6-7 (NLT)

Where in my life do I need God's physical provision – sustenance, energy or strength - today?

Father, I invite You, Jehovah-jireh – God who provides – to give me what I need.

Pause and Pray

Where in my life do I need to invite the spiritual refreshment of the Holy Spirit today?

Holy Spirit, I invite You to fill me, again.

Pause and Pray

What 'journey' is ahead of me that I need to be sustained for? What awaits me in the coming days?

Jesus, I invite You to provide refreshment today. Prepare me to follow You in the journey ahead.

Pause and Pray

I pause and ground these prayers by praying for someone I know who also needs God's provision, refreshment or direction today.

Pause and pray

I pray a prayer of gathering and releasing, by preacher and poet Ted Loder:

*'Oh God, gather me now to be with you
as you are with me.*

*Soothe my tiredness;
quiet my fretfulness;
curb my aimlessness;
relieve my compulsiveness;
let me be easy for a moment.*

*O Lord, release me
from the fears and guilts which grip me so tightly;
from the expectations and opinions which I so tightly grip,
that I may be open
to receiving what you give,
to risking something genuinely new,
to learning something refreshingly different.*

*O God, gather me to be with you
as you are with me'.***

**** Ted Loder, Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle, p76**

As I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming Sabbath day, I breathe slowly, and repeat the words of Psalm 119, making them my prayer:

*'Let your love, God, shape my life'
Psalm 119:41 (MSG)*

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**

July 12 2021 (click for audio)

Last Man Standing

Today is Monday the 12th of Juy, and we're continuing our 'After the Fire' series, exploring the presence of God in the earth-shaking moments in our lives.

So far in our journey, God has met Elijah by caring for him when he was exhausted. God met him in the cave on Mount Horeb, and God spoke to him in a whisper. This week I'm reflecting on the God who brings hope.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You, and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice; my eyes see Your goodness; and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's comfort today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 10...

The Lord is king forever and ever!

The godless nations will vanish from the land.

Lord, you know the hopes of the helpless.

Surely you will hear their cries and comfort them.

Psalm 10:16-17

Pause and pray

Elijah is discouraged and airs his complaint to the Lord, 'I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.' (1 Kings 19:14). Today I reflect on God's response...

The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.

1 Kings 19:15-18

Elijah believes that he is the last man standing. (1 Kings 19:14). But God provides hope by sharing His perspective. Elijah is not on his own. In fact, there are seven thousand others who will stand with him!

Have I ever felt alone in my faith? Do I feel like a lone fish swimming against the cultural stream? And like Elijah, does my current relational world feel hostile or unsafe?

Ask

God, I bring my personal circumstances before You. Maybe I'm the only Christian in my family, or maybe my spouse isn't a believer. Perhaps I'm the only Christian in my class at school, or in my workplace. I ask You to give me a hope filled perspective.

Pause and pray

God I pray for those who are the only Christians in their families or friendship groups. Would You bring consolation, words of life to them in their isolation? Would you bring like-minded people into their lives? In the quiet I pray for someone I know who needs hope.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.

1 Kings 19:15-18

I wonder if Elijah was so hopeless because he was only focusing on the problem. Often when I teach intercessors about discernment, I say to them, 'It doesn't take a gift of discernment to see where the world, the flesh, and the devil are at work. Anybody can see that. It takes discernment to see where God is at work in the midst.'

After Elijah's hopeless complaint, God shares His perspective. Don't despair Elijah. You're not alone.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God I'm so aware of how limited my viewpoint is. I give You my eyes – would You show me what You see. I give You my narrow understanding - would You give me Your broad perspective? I give You my discouragement - would You give me Your hope?

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in John 14:

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

John 14:12-14

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.

[July 13 2021 \(click for audio\)](#)

Last Resort or First Response?

Today is Tuesday the 13th of July and this week we are reflecting on how we can pursue God's perspective and cultivate hope.

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

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You, and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice; my eyes see Your goodness; and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to hope in God's saving power today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 25...

*O Lord, I give my life to you.
I trust in you, my God!
Do not let me be disgraced,
or let my enemies rejoice in my defeat...
Show me the right path, O Lord;
point out the road for me to follow.
Lead me by your truth and teach me,
for you are the God who saves me.
All day long I put my hope in you.
Psalm 25:1,2,4,5*

Pause and pray

Yesterday I reflected on a moment in Elijah's life where God changed his perspective and infused him with hope. For the rest of this week, I'm going to explore another story from the Old Testament to learn how I can actively pursue God's perspective and cultivate hope...

After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to wage war against Jehoshaphat. Some people came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Dead Sea. It is already in Hazezon Tamar" (that is, En Gedi). Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all

Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.

2 Chronicles 20:1-4

While Ahab was king over Israel, Jehosephat was king over Judah. In this story I see Jehosephat facing overwhelming opposition – a vast army of his enemies. At first glance, it seems hopeless.

Ask

What opposition am I experiencing in my life right now? Maybe I'm my own worst enemy, and my own habits, hang-ups and hurts are arrayed against me like an army of foes. Perhaps I'm having relational difficulties, or maybe I'm in over my head, overwhelmed and just don't know what to do.

God, as I sit in the quiet, I ask that You would show me the state of my heart. I get honest with You – name it all before You, and invite You to come and meet me.

Pause and pray

God I pray for those I know who are facing overwhelming opposition, where the battle feels fierce and unrelenting. Would You come and visit them right now with Your presence and Your power. I name a friend or family member before You now and pray for them

Pause and pray

Yield

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

After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to wage war against Jehoshaphat. Some people came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Dead Sea. It is already in Hazezon Tamar" (that is, En Gedi). Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.

2 Chronicles 20:1-4

In the face of fierce opposition, the first thing that Jehoshaphat did was resolve to inquire of the Lord. He knows that God is the source of his hope. And the king didn't pray alone – he gathered his community around him to seek God as well.

In the face of difficulty, is prayer my last resort or my first response? And how likely am I to invite other people to join me in my battle and to pray with me?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God I'm sorry for the times I've tried to fight my battles on my own. You are the source of my hope and strength. I'm sorry for the times my independence and pride has robbed me of the strength of community. Grant me the humility to lean into You and others.

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 25:

No one who hopes in [Me] will ever be put to shame...

Psalm 25:3a

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to live this day to the full,

being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,

being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost,

proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.

Amen.

July 14 2021 (click for audio)

God Can Do It Again

Today is Wednesday the 14th of July and this week we are continuing to explore how we can pursue God's perspective and cultivate hope.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You, and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice; my eyes see Your goodness; and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

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

I am praying to you because I know you will answer, O God.

Bend down and listen as I pray.

Show me your unfailing love in wonderful ways.

By your mighty power you rescue

those who seek refuge from their enemies.

Psalm 17:6,7

Pause and pray

King Jehoshaphat of Judah is under attack, with multiple armies coming after him and his people. His first response? To inquire of the Lord. Today I reflect on the beginning of his prayer.

Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the Lord in the front of the new courtyard and said: "Lord, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. Our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?

2 Chronicles 20:5-7

I'm struck by how different my prayers are to Jehoshaphat's. I usually start with my litany of complaints and laments. My problems can loom large in my own eyes and sometimes I can feel overwhelmed and defeated before I even begin.

When Jehoshaphat prays, he doesn't start with the problem. He starts with the solution, and begins his prayer by recounting God's pre-eminence and His power.

What might happen if instead of talking to God about my troubles, I talk to my troubles about God?

Ask

Lord, the God of our ancestors, are You not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in Your hand, and no one can withstand you. Today I look first of all to You, and declare Your greatness in the midst of my struggle.

Pause and pray

Today I pray for my faith community.

Lord, give us a bigger vision of who You are and what You have done. May we declare Your greatness, Your strength and Your power in the face of adversity

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 Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the Lord in the front of the new courtyard and said: "Lord, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. Our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?"
2 Chronicles 20:5-7

Jehoshaphat remembers what God has already done - in particular defeating the enemies of Israel. God did it before. He can do it again.

In the quiet I bring to mind, one by one, memories of how You have helped me in the past. With each memory, I declare, 'You did it before. You can do it again.'

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

*Today I yield myself to you with this prayer from theologian and justice activist Howard Thurman**

*Open unto me, light for my darkness
Open unto me, courage for my fear
Open unto me, hope for my despair
Open unto me, peace for my turmoil
Open unto me, joy for my sorrow
Open unto me, strength for my weakness
Open unto me, wisdom for my confusion
Open unto me, forgiveness for my sins
Open unto me, tenderness for my toughness*

*Open unto me, love for my hates
Open unto me, Thy Self for myself
Lord, Lord, open unto me!*

** Howard Thurman – Meditations of the Heart, Beacon Press (August 1, 1999)*

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 115:

*You who fear [Me], trust in the Lord –
[I am your] help and shield.
Psalm 115:11*

Closing Prayer

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

July 15 2021 (click for audio)

How Hope Flourishes

Today is Thursday the 15th of July and this week we are continuing to explore the story of King Jehoshaphat and how we can find hope in the midst of life's struggles.

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

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You, and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice; my eyes see Your goodness; and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*O Lord, I have so many enemies;
so many are against me.
many are saying,
"God will never rescue him!"
But you, O Lord, are a shield around me;
you are my glory, the one who holds my head high.
I cried out to the Lord,
and he answered me from his holy mountain
Psalm 3:1-4*

Pause and pray

Jehoshaphat has gathered his community and is inquiring of the Lord on the eve of a great battle. Today I reflect on the rest of the king's prayer...

'They have lived in it and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying, 'If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.'

"But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face

this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.
2 Chronicles 20: 8-12

Yesterday, Jehoshaphat spoke to his problems about God, and reminded God of His former help and deliverance. Today he acknowledges his own limitations, his insufficiency and ignorance.

The culture around me tells me I can do anything I put my mind and effort to, but if I'm honest, that's not always my lived experience. I wonder if the biggest enemy of hope in my life is my hope in myself? My self-sufficiency, independence and pride?

Ask

Today I base my prayer on the first two principles of Alcoholics Anonymous*.

*God I am powerless over whatever is overwhelming me today, and my life is unmanageable.
But You are the God of all power!*

**Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th Edition, p.354*

Pause and pray

God, I pray for addicts of all kinds. Would You help them come to the end of themselves, their insufficient strength and resources, and would You help them to humbly reach for the resources of heaven? Would You display your power towards them today? I name someone who struggles with addiction and I pray for them now.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

They have lived in it and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying, 'If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.'

"But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. Our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

2 Chronicles 20: 8-12

'We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.'

I can lose hope when I focus on my battles and dwell on my failures. How might hope flourish if instead I resolutely focus on God Himself? On his character? His power? His great love for me? What might happen if I fix my eyes on Jesus, who is the author and perfecter of my faith? (Hebrews 12:2)

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

I yield today with the third step prayer from Alcoholics Anonymous:

*God, I offer myself to Thee—to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always. ***

*** Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th Edition. p.63*

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 12:

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.
2 Corinthians 12:9

Closing Prayer

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

July 16 2021 (click for audio)

The Next Right Thing

Today is Friday the 16th of Juyy, and this week we continue our exploration of hope and divine perspective, through the story of King Jehoshaphat.

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

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You, and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice; my eyes see Your goodness; and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's power today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Isaiah 40...

*The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of all the earth.
He never grows weak or weary.
No one can measure the depths of his understanding.
He gives power to the weak
and strength to the powerless.
Isaiah 40:28-29*

Pause and pray

King Jehoshaphat inquired of the Lord, and then, suddenly, God speaks through a prophet...

Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel...He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow march down against them...You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.'
2 Chronicles 20: 14a-15,17

The battle is not mine, but God's. But that's not permission for me to be passive to just lay on the couch and hope that somehow, some way, God will do something. The prophet gives the king some specific instructions. Don't be afraid. March down. Take up your positions. Stand firm.

It's likely God will ask me to *do* something to face the challenge. But ultimately, it's not my battle: it's God's. All I have to do is submit and obey. The rest is up to Him.

Ask

God first of all, I repent of passivity. For giving up and withdrawing from the challenge – whatever my personal battle may be. Would You strengthen me with power on the inside by Your Spirit? (Eph. 3:16). Show me the next right thing, and give me the courage and the willingness to obey.

Pause and pray

God I pray for those who have pulled back from the front lines of their lives, retreating behind mindless social media scrolling and Netflix binge watching. God, would you give them the courage and the grace to begin again, to try again?

I ask you to bring someone to mind and I pray for them now.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel...He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.'"

2 Chronicles 20: 14a-15,17

The prophetic word ends with the promise of God's presence. It's a familiar refrain that echoes across the whole Biblical story. God said to Joshua 'As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you' (Joshua 1:5). He said to Gideon, 'The Lord is with you, mighty warrior' (Judges 6:12). An angel says to Mary, 'the Lord is with you.' (Luke 1:28). And Jesus says 'Surely I am with you always' (Matthew 28:20).

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I give You any anxiety or loneliness I may feel today, and I yield myself to the promise and peace of Your presence. I am not alone. I am not forsaken. You are with me. Always.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, I lay hold of the promise in Psalm 23:

'Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.'

Psalms 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.

July 17 2021 (click for audio)

Worship is Our Warfare

Today is Saturday the 17th of July, and is the final day I am reflecting on the story of Jehoshaphat, to glean how he cultivated hope and God's perspective in an overwhelming situation.

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

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You, and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice; my eyes see Your goodness; and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's glory today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 24...

*Open up, ancient gates!
Open up, ancient doors,
and let the King of glory enter.
Who is the King of glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty;
the Lord, invincible in battle.
Open up, ancient gates!
Open up, ancient doors,
and let the King of glory enter.
Psalm 24:7-9*

Pause and pray

King Jehoshaphat has inquired of the Lord, received his answer, and in today's passage, he steps into battle...

Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful." After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying:

*"Give thanks to the Lord,
for his love endures forever."*

As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.

2 Chronicles 20:20-22

I'm not sure I would have wanted to be one of King Jehoshaphat's worship leaders. Worship in a sanctuary - yes - or even on the church lawn (as long as the weather stays sunny). But worship on the front line of a pitched battle? That might be one time that I might want to say, 'here I am Lord, send someone else'!

Ask

Has there ever been a time that God has asked me to do something that seemed counter intuitive, foolish or even risky? Did I do it? What happened when I did?

God, I know that You chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; You chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. Give me the courage today to be foolish. To be weak. To be obedient. To be Yours.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for worship leaders. Increase their faith, their confidence in You and their courage. Increase their spiritual authority. May their worship be their warfare. Give them songs that lift You up, and as they exalt you, tear down every stronghold of the enemy.

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.

Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful." After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying:

*"Give thanks to the Lord,
for his love endures forever."*

As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.

2 Chronicles 20:20-22

Jehoshaphat's circumstances were challenging; and yet He cultivated God's perspective and hope by inviting God into the situation; posturing Himself before God and inviting His community to do the same. And then, when he finally stepped into battle, Jehoshaphat's eyes were fixed on the power of God – not his army - to prevail. And the enemy was defeated.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

You are the God of all hope. I ask that You would fill me with joy and peace as I put my trust in You, so that I may overflow with hope by the power of Your Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

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 8:

Through the praise of children and infants [I] have established a stronghold against [My] enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

Psalm 8:2

Closing Prayer

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

July 18 2021 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Prayer

It's Sunday the 18th of July and this week we've been continuing our After the Fire Series, exploring the lives of Elijah and Jehoshaphat learning how to encounter God's presence in the earth-shaking moments in our lives.

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

Ruth Haley Barton says that keeping the Sabbath, '...honors the body's need for rest, the spirit's need for replenishment, and the soul's need to delight itself in God for God's sake'*

* Ruth Haley Barton, The Road We Must Travel, A Personal Guide for Your Journey (Worthy publishing, 2004)

Lord, I bring my body before You for rest and restoration. I lift my Spirit to You for replenishment and refreshment. And I still my soul to wait in Your presence, on this day of rest.

Pause and pray

On this Sabbath, I return to Elijah's story, reflecting on how God met both his spiritual and physical needs:

[Elijah] looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again.

Then the angel of the Lord came again and touched him and said, "Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you."

1 Kings 19:6-7 (NLT)

Where in my life do I need God's physical provision – sustenance, energy or strength - today?

Father, I invite You, Jehovah-jireh – God who provides – to give me what I need.

Pause and Pray

Where in my life do I need to invite the spiritual refreshment of the Holy Spirit today?

Holy Spirit, I invite You to fill me, again.

Pause and Pray

What 'journey' is ahead of me that I need to be sustained for? What awaits me in the coming days?

Jesus, I invite You to provide refreshment today. Prepare me to follow You in the journey ahead.

Pause and Pray

I pause and ground these prayers by praying for someone I know who also needs God's provision, refreshment or direction Today

Pause and pray

I pray a prayer of gathering and releasing, by preacher and poet Ted Loder:

‘Oh God, gather me now to be with you
as you are with me.

Soothe my tiredness;
quiet my fretfulness;
curb my aimlessness;
relieve my compulsiveness;
let me be easy for a moment.

O Lord, release me
from the fears and guilts which grip me so tightly;
from the expectations and opinions which I so tightly grip,
that I may be open
to receiving what you give,
to risking something genuinely new,
to learning something refreshingly different.

O God, gather me to be with you
as you are with me’.**

** Ted Loder, *Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle*, p76

As I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming Sabbath day, I breathe slowly, and repeat the words of Psalm 119, making them my prayer:

*‘Let your love, God, shape my life’
Psalm 119:41 (MSG)*

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

July 19 2021 (click for audio)

Walking Backwards: The Way You Came

Today is Monday the 19th of July, and this is the final week of our After the Fire Series, exploring the presence of God in the earth-shaking moments of our lives.

This week we will be listening carefully for the whisper of God, asking that he would inspire our prayers and provoke our thinking through the story of Elijah's recommissioning on Mount Horeb.

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

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You, and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice; my eyes see Your goodness; and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer of Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

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

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

Pause and pray

Today, and each day this week, I'm going to circle just five verses from 1 Kings 19, going a little deeper each time, focusing on different phrases and using them to fuel my prayers. I imagine Elijah sitting in a cave high up in the arid wilderness of Mount Horeb enveloped by the stillness after the storm, conversing quietly with God...

The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him." So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair.

Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.

1 Kings 19:15-19

God tells Elijah to do the very thing he least wants to do: 'Go back the way you came'. Elijah has been forced to flee for his life, and God says, 'Go back the way you came'. He's walked for forty days and nights, weak with hunger to reach this place of safety, and God says, 'Go back the way you came'. He's discouraged, despondent and depressed, and God tells him to face his failure and fear, saying 'Go back the way you came'. He's longing to linger in this sacred space of holy encounter, but God says, 'Go back the way you came.'

Ask

I'm used to the Lord calling me forth to new things, not sending me back to confront painful ones. Holy Spirit, are there any areas of fear and failure in my past which You are asking me to address? What shadows am I running away from that it's time for me to confront?

Pause and pray

Thinking now of someone who clearly still carries the pain of their past around with them, I ask the Lord to speak to them gently but firmly – as He did with Elijah – giving them both the clarity and the courage to address the thing they'd rather Avoid.

Pause and pray

Yield

I turn now to another prophet similarly redirected by God to face the very thing from which he'd been running...

The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord. Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god... Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm... Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights...

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

Jonah 1:1-5a, 15,17, 3:1-2

Where is my 'Tarshish', the place to which I run when I'm hiding from God? Is there something, however small, God is asking me to do which I'm trying to avoid? I name it now before him.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Like Elijah, I quiet my soul to listen for Your gentle whisper today.

Like Elijah, I stir myself to face my fears, retrace my steps, go back the way I came.

Like Jesus, I say: 'Not my will, but Yours be done.'

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to leave my cave and head back down the mountain, the Lord who loves me gives me this wonderful assurance...

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isaiah 41:10

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.

July 20, 2021 (click for audio)

Walking Backwards: Exercising Authority

Today is Tuesday the 20th of July and throughout this week we are concluding our After the Fire Series. Together we'll listen carefully for the whisper of God through just five verses of the Bible, asking the Holy Spirit to inspire our prayers and provoke our thinking through the story of Elijah's recommissioning on Mount Horeb.

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

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You, and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice; my eyes see Your goodness; and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer of Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's unfailing love today, joining with the ancient praise of all his people in the words of Psalm 59...

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

Pause and pray

Today, like yesterday, I return to Elijah's commissioning in 1 Kings 19, and circle these now familiar words, particularly noticing the physicality of God's instructions – the names of actual people and places I might otherwise ignore...

The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him." So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair.

Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.

1 Kings 19:15-19

Elijah's commission is practical and tactical. One word in every seven in this passage names either a person or a place. I don't recognize these names, so it's easy to tune them out, but if I did, these verses might read a bit like a game of chess. God is making moves, maneuvering particular people into positions of geo-political and spiritual power. There's to be a new king in Aram, a new king in Israel and even a new prophet in the land too.

Ask

Elijah may well have thought 'Why me? Who am I to go around anointing kings? Why should foreigners like the Arameans listen to me?' But God gives Elijah spiritual authority to redress structural power. Where might God be calling me to exercise spiritual authority today? Perhaps in my workplace, school or family.

I ask God for confidence and clarity, bravery and strength to step into the spiritual authority I carry because of Him.

Pause and pray

I may not have authority to determine international affairs like Elijah, but I do have a sphere of influence. Thinking now of the leadership dynamics around me, who do I see God raising up? Is there someone – perhaps on the fringes - upon whom He seems to be placing his hand

I pray for them now, asking God to show me how I might particularly encourage them this Week.

Pause and pray

Yield

I turn now from the prophet Elijah to the prophet Daniel at another time of political upheaval, echoing his prayer, and especially its last line...

Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;

wisdom and power are his.

He changes times and seasons;

he deposes kings and raises up others.

He gives wisdom to the wise

and knowledge to the discerning.

He reveals deep and hidden things;

he knows what lies in darkness,

and light dwells with him.

I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors:

you have given me wisdom and power.

Daniel 2:20-23a

Instead of asking God for wisdom and power, as I so often do, today I thank him for the wisdom and power he's already bestowed upon my life.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Like Elijah I quiet my soul to listen for Your gentle whisper today.

Like Elijah I choose to exercise the authority You have given me today.

Like Jesus I say: 'Not my will, but Yours be done.'

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to leave my cave and head back down the mountain, the Lord who loves me reassures me with these words...

"I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

Romans 9:17

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.

July 21 2021 (click for audio)

Walking Backwards: Letting Go

Today is Wednesday the 21st of July. This week we are concluding our After the Fire Series, listening carefully for the whisper of God asking the Holy Spirit to inspire our prayers and provoke our thinking through the story of Elijah's recommissioning on Mount Horeb.

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

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You, and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice; my eyes see Your goodness; and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in the way God covers my back, honors my name, and lifts my head, joining with the ancient praise of all his people in the words of Psalm 3...

*"But you, O Lord, are a shield around me;
you are my glory, the one who holds my head high.
I cried out to the Lord,
and he answered me from his holy mountain.
I lay down and slept,
yet I woke up in safety,
for the Lord was watching over me.
Psalm 3:3-5*

Pause and pray

At the heart of Lectio Divina is the art of reading slowly and even cyclically, using my imagination to listen between the lines for the whisper of God. And so, once again today, I return to the five verses I've been circling for several days, asking the Lord to highlight something new...

The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him." So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair.

Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.
1 Kings 19:15-19

I wonder how Elijah felt about being sent to anoint and appoint his own successor? Leaders rarely get this right. Many cling to positions of power for too long. Others jump ship too soon, abandoning and even orphaning organizations that still need their help.

Ask

Thinking about the people and things for which I am responsible, I pause now to examine my own soul. Is my tendency to hold on to power, position and profile for too long? Or is it to avoid, or abdicate responsibility too quickly?

I pray now about my relationship with power, position and control.

Pause and pray

The Bible says that 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' (James 4:6) I pray now for anyone known to me who has lost position, profile or power, perhaps through retirement, redundancy, sickness, or the breakdown of a relationship.

Lord give them the grace they need to embrace this difficult season and hope for the season to Come

Pause and pray

Yield

Instead of returning to the Scriptures as normal, I yield to God with one of the most challenging prayers of surrender from the Jesuit Prayer book...

O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, Hear me.

From the desire of being praised, Deliver me, O Jesus.

From the desire of being preferred to others...

From the desire of being consulted...

From the desire of being approved, Deliver me, O Jesus.

From the fear of being forgotten...

From the fear of being ridiculed...

From the fear of being wronged...

From the fear of being suspected, Deliver me, O Jesus.

That others may be loved more than I, Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

That others may be esteemed more than I...

That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase and I may decrease,

Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

That others may be chosen and I set aside...

That others may be praised and I go unnoticed...

That others may be preferred to me in everything...

That others may become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should,

*Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it. **

*Taken from Dirty Glory by Pete Greig (NavPress / Hodder). For the unabridged version of this prayer, see 'Litany of Humility' by Cardinal Rafael Merry del Val, secretary of state to Pope Saint Pius X from the prayer book for Jesuits, 1963.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Having humbled myself, I trust You Lord to raise me up in due course.

Having emptied myself, I ask You Lord to fill me with Your Spirit.

Having surrendered my selfish ambition, I ask You Lord to set my heart aflame with holy ambition.

Yielding Promise

And now, I celebrate the assurance that 'The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honor, and life' (Prov.22:4 NASB) in this world and the one to come.

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.

July 22 2021 (click for audio)

Walking Backwards: Judgement and Justice

Today is Thursday the 22nd of July. Throughout this week we are asking the Holy Spirit to inspire our prayers and provoke out thinking through the story of Elijah's recommissioning on Mount Horeb.

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

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You, and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice; my eyes see Your goodness; and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in the song of my salvation today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 40...

*I waited patiently for the Lord to help me,
and he turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the pit of despair,
out of the mud and the mire.
He set my feet on solid ground
and steadied me as I walked along.
He has given me a new song to sing,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see what he has done and be amazed.
They will put their trust in the Lord.
Psalm 40:1-3*

Pause and pray

Today for the fourth time this week I return to Elijah's commissioning in 1 Kings 19, seeking new angles on this now familiar passage as fuel for my prayers...

The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him." So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair.

Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.
1 Kings 19:15-19

The most disconcerting aspect of these verses, the bit that preachers tend to ignore but which we cannot avoid any longer, is its violence. Elijah is sent to anoint two kings and a prophet for a singularly sobering purpose: to execute large numbers of Baal worshipers. What on earth is going on here? How am I to reconcile this kind of thing with Jesus?

This is the right question because we must indeed reconcile these verses with Jesus who teaches us to love our enemies and certainly not to slay them with the sword. As one writer says, 'When we see Christ dead upon the cross, we discover a God who would rather die than kill his enemies.' * There may well be an element here, therefore, of 'progressive revelation' - the idea that the Old Testament writers were slowly moving towards the full revelation of God in Christ.

* Brian Zahnd, *A Farewell to Mars*

The mortal reality of sin's seriousness must also be acknowledged; It is a cancer which must ultimately be removed before it kills the entire body. In Elijah's time, God had tolerated Ahab and Jezebel's sin, but they had refused to repent, even after the showdown on Mount Carmel.

'The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love' (Ps. 145:8), but in his love and his justice he will not tolerate evil forever. **

** It is impossible to deal with such massive questions in this context. Those wishing to delve deeper might like to read either Christopher J.H. Wright *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith* (Zondervan) or Gregory A. Boyd, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God* (Vol's 1 & 2) (Fortress Press)

Ask

The apostle John says that 'If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. [But] if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.' (1 John 1:8-9)

I take some time now to get my own heart right by confessing my sins to the Lord.

Pause and pray

What forms does idolatry take in my world today? What false gods do my friends and neighbors worship?

I take time now to pray for them, asking that 'many will see what [Jesus] has done and be amazed. They will put their trust in the Lord.'
Psalms 40:3

Pause and pray

Yield

I turn now to one of the most famous parts of the Bible to consider God's own wonderful answer to the precise questions I've been asking today. It's late at night and Jesus is addressing a powerful Pharisee called Nicodemus...

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him." For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

John 3:14-17

I take a moment now simply to thank God for loving me so much that he sent Jesus to save me by dying for me on the cross.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

I draw the themes of this challenging Lectio together in the words of Judson Van DeVenter's famous hymn:

*All to Jesus I surrender
All to Him I freely give
I will ever love and trust Him
In His presence daily live
I surrender all
I surrender all
All to Thee my blessed Savior
I surrender all*

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me promises that...

As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
Psalms 103:11-12

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.

July 23 2021 (click for audio)

Susanna Wesley: Hero of Prayer and Learning

It's Friday the 23rd of July and today we're pausing our After the Fire series to learn from the 'Mother of Methodism', Susanna Wesley, who died on this day in 1742. On Feast Days we pause to celebrate the stories and learn from the lives of heroes of faith, whose collective witness embodies our six practices at the heart of Lectio 365. These are: Prayer and Creativity, Justice and Hospitality, Learning and Mission. Today we are thanking God for the inspirational life of Susanna Wesley, an extraordinary hero of prayer and 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

Whenever Susanna Wesley wanted to pray, as I am wanting to pray now, she would pull her apron over her head to assert a measure of privacy from her children.

In a similar way, as I draw near to You now, Lord, help me to shut out the many distractions and demands of the world in order to focus my heart and mind entirely upon You.

Rejoice and Reflect

I celebrate the Lord as my hope and my hiding place today, joining in the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 32...

You are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble.

You surround me with songs of victory.

The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life.

I will advise you and watch over you.

Do not be like a senseless horse or mule

that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control."

Many sorrows come to the wicked, but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the Lord.

So rejoice in the Lord and be glad, all you who obey him!

Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!

Psalm 32:7-11

Pause and pray

Susanna Wesley, mother of John and Charles, the founders of Methodism, endured a difficult marriage to a penniless preacher who was imprisoned twice. Their home was burned down twice. And tragically nine of their nineteen children died in infancy. Somehow Susanna raised their remaining ten children almost single-handedly, regarding motherhood as a vocation from God.

With nowhere at home to pray privately, Susanna's children quickly learned that when her apron was over her head, their mother was not to be disturbed. In this unusual posture, she would pour her heart out to God, no doubt mourning her lost babies, interceding for her infuriating husband, and praying for each of her children by name.

Susanna took education seriously, home-schooling her children for six hours a day, teaching her seven daughters the same as her three sons. She also gave an extra hour of exclusive time to each child each week. "I look upon every soul under my charge," she explained, "as a talent committed to me under a trust."*

*John Whitehead, *The Life of Rev. John Wesley: Some Time Fellow of Lincoln College*(Oxford Volume 1) p46-47

Ask

Who are the 'souls under my charge... committed to me under a trust'? How might I give them my undivided attention this week? I pray for them now by name.

Pause and pray

Thinking of the Christian parents I know, seeking to raise their children well, I ask You, Lord, to inspire them with fresh imagination, equip them with renewed strength and restore their reserves of grace Today.

Pause and pray

Yield

Susanna Wesley was a formidable leader long before her sons John and Charles rose to fame. When her husband, the Rector of Epworth parish church, was imprisoned for financial mismanagement and his replacement in the pulpit failed miserably to preach the gospel, Susanna took matters into her own hands.

She launched a Sunday school in the kitchen for her children, which began to attract so many of their neighbors that it had to be reconvened in the barn. Before long, 200 people were gathering every Sunday to worship, pray and listen to Susanna reading sermons. Meanwhile, the church building nearby languished almost empty.

Susanna Wesley was a world-class leader, educator and prayer warrior, but her mission field was her own tribe. She applied herself to this task tirelessly, praying faithfully for those ten children, and teaching them diligently. She was a housewife with a hard life from a small town in rural England, but she became the mother of some eighty million Methodists in more than 130 nations today.

Yielding Prayer

A Prayer of Susanna Wesley:

'Help me, Lord, to remember that religion is not to be confined to the church, or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere I am in Your presence. So may my

*every word and action have a moral content. May all the happenings of my life prove useful and beneficial to me. May all things instruct me and afford me an opportunity of exercising some virtue and daily learning and growing toward Your likeness. Amen' ***

****Pete Greig, How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People (Hodder 2019) p31-32**

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me assures me that if I will just:

*Start children off on the way they should go,
even when they are old they will not turn from it.
Proverbs 22:6*

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.

July 24 2021 (click for audio)

Walking Backwards: the Mantle

Today is Saturday the 24th of July, and today we've reached the concluding day of our six-week After the Fire series exploring the story of Elijah.

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

Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek You, and wisdom to find You today. May my ears hear Your voice; my eyes see Your goodness; and my tongue proclaim Your name as I commit my life to pleasing You. (Adapted from a prayer by Benedict of Nursia)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in 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

Pause and pray

Today, for the final time this week, I return to 1 Kings 19:15-19, listening carefully for anything else the Holy Spirit may still want to say to me through it...

The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him." So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.

1 Kings 19:15-19

Elijah finds his successor Elisha plowing with twelve yoke of oxen. This is a significant number. Firstly, it means that he is a prosperous farmer who gives up great wealth to become Elijah's disciple. And secondly, the number twelve may also be metaphorical, representing as it often can, the twelve tribes

of Israel. If so, this scene depicts Elisha as one steering the people of God whilst breaking up fallow ground.

This reminds me of Jesus' first encounter with four of his disciples as they were mending their nets: 'Come follow me,' he said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' (Matt.4:19) Like Elisha they left their possessions and their professions to become disciples.

Ask

Elisha left his oxen, Simon Peter left his nets. What is it that I am giving up or laying down to follow Jesus today? It may be an obvious thing; wealth, security or a relationship; or something less evident, such as popularity or acceptance.

I take time now to tell the Lord that he is worthy of every sacrifice.

Pause and pray

Thinking now about someone known to me who is successful and prosperous like Elisha, I ask the Lord to surprise them with new challenges and opportunities to make sacrifices for his sake.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to this exchange between Elijah and Elisha, I picture the scene: the half-plowed field with birds circling overhead, the oxen sweating and panting, the other eleven plowmen looking on in surprise...

Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. 'Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,' he said, 'and then I will come with you.' 'Go back,' Elijah replied. 'What have I done to you?'

1 Kings 19:19-20

What word or phrase jumped out at me from these verses?

Elijah's cloak (or 'mantle') represented his authority as a prophet. It was also a valuable possession. Elisha immediately understood its significance without a word being spoken.

Who is my Elisha? Who am I training as Jesus trained his disciples, and as Paul trained Timothy? I ask the Lord to show me who that person might be.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Like Elijah I quiet my soul to listen for Your gentle whisper today.

Like Elijah I choose to give my best for others.

Like Jesus I say: 'Not my will, but Yours be done.'

Yielding Promise

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

No one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.

Luke 18:29-30

Closing Prayer

Father, help me to live this day to the full,

being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,

being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost,

proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.

Amen.

July 25 2021 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Prayer

Today is Sunday the 25th of July and so we are stepping away from our usual rhythms to enjoy this special day of rest.

In her book *The Mudhouse Sabbath* Lauren Winner distinguishes between the idea of taking a day off for 'me' and taking a day off for God.

'In observing the Sabbath,' she writes, 'one is both giving a gift to God and imitating him. Exodus and Deuteronomy make this clear when they say, 'Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God.' *To the Lord your God.*' *

*Lauren F. Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath*, Paraclete Press, 2003, p.11

And so, as I prepare to pray on this day of giving to God and imitating God, 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 quieted 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.'
Psalm 131 (NIV)*

On this day in 1471, Thomas à Kempis, author of *The Imitation of Christ*, died. The Imitation of Christ is generally considered to be the most widely-read devotional of all time. And so I pray now a prayer of rest, written by Thomas a Kempis and extracted from his classic work: *The Imitation of Christ*

*Above all things and in all things, O my soul, rest always in God, for He is the everlasting rest of the saints. Grant, most sweet and loving Jesus, that I may seek my repose in You above every creature; above all health and beauty; above every honor and glory... Whatever You give me besides Yourself, whatever You reveal to me concerning Yourself, and whatever You promise, is too small and insufficient when I do not see and fully enjoy You alone. For my heart cannot rest or be fully content until, rising above all gifts and every created thing, it rests in You.'***

**Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, p. 125

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

July 26 2021 (click for audio)

The Peace of Jerusalem

It's Monday the 26th of July, and we are beginning a new series on Lectio 365. From today, we will be exploring the ancient Hebrew idea of 'Shalom' an all-inclusive word meaning peace, prosperity and well-being. This week we will be exploring shalom and prayer.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of Shalom, I offer You my worries, I bring You my brokenness and I surrender my striving. As I rest in Your presence, I receive Your peace.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

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

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the words of a joyful psalm of praise, which Hebrew pilgrims used to sing on their way to worship the Lord together in the temple at Jerusalem...

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:

*'May those who love you be secure.
May there be peace within your walls
and security within your citadels.'
For the sake of my family and friends,
I will say, 'Peace be within you.'
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your prosperity.
Psalm 122:6-9*

Pray for the peace - the Shalom - of Jerusalem. Why? Because, to the people of ancient Israel, the Jerusalem Temple was the house of YHWH, God's dwelling place. Jerusalem was the city where the

tribes came together and where heaven touched earth. To pray for Shalom is to pray an all-embracing prayer for peace and prosperity; that everything would be exactly as it should be.

Ask

Where do I need God's Shalom today? Am I feeling troubled and out of sorts with myself? Do I have unresolved conflicts at home? Or with a neighbor, colleague or a friend?

Lord, may I experience Your Shalom right where I need it for the day ahead.

Pause and pray

Lord, I pray for the Church; the house of God in the place that is my Jerusalem. May it be a place of Shalom, not just for my 'tribe', but for all who name You as Lord. I name the congregations where I live and ask that they would know Your peace, prosperity and well-being.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage I listen for a particular word or phrase that the Holy Spirit is highlighting to me today...

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:

*'May those who love you be secure.
May there be peace within your walls
and security within your citadels.'
For the sake of my family and friends,
I will say, 'Peace be within you.'
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your prosperity.
Psalm 122:6-9*

In addition to Shalom, the psalmist uses several other Hebrew words to convey the idea of peace and well-being in this prayer for Jerusalem. The last line stands out for me today: 'I will seek your prosperity'. The Hebrew word translated prosperity is *Tov*, which means 'good'. It is the word repeated throughout Genesis 1 to describe the new life springing out of God's fresh creation. 'Indeed, it was very good.' (Gen 1:31 NRSV)

How can I pray for God's fruitful goodness in the place where I live today?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Father, I yield myself to Your purpose; to see peace, prosperity and goodness increase and multiply in my life, in my family, my church, my community, and my world.

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 25:

*Who are those who fear the Lord?
He will show them the path they should choose.
They will live in prosperity,
and their children will inherit the land.
Psalm 25:12-13 (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.

July 27 2021 (click for audio)

Prayers for Babylon

Today is Tuesday the 27th of July, and this week we are exploring the ancient Hebrew idea of Shalom, and how it relates to prayer.

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

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of Shalom, I offer You my worries, I bring You my brokenness and I surrender my striving. As I rest in Your presence, I receive Your peace.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God’s generosity today, joining with the ancient praise of all God’s people in the words of Psalm 112...

Praise the Lord!

*How joyful are those who fear the Lord
and delight in obeying his commands.*

*Their children will be successful everywhere;
an entire generation of godly people will be blessed.*

*They themselves will be wealthy,
and their good deeds will last forever.*

Psalm 112:1-3

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on what Shalom looks like in a time of disruption, when nothing is as it should be.

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ‘Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.’
Jeremiah 29:4-7

God's people are in exile in Babylon. But their hearts are still in Jerusalem. Surprisingly, God says, 'You have to embrace the disruption. Live in the place you don't want to be as if it were your true home. Oh, and you know how you used to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, now do the same for Babylon.' This is a radical call, not to take up arms to fight a culture war, but to care for the culture of an alien empire, enriching it with the life of the kingdom of God.

Ask

When I feel alienated from the world around me, I am tempted to withdraw and not get too involved. Am I avoiding getting involved rather than engaging right now?

Lord, help me to care for the culture of the community in which I live.

Pause and pray

Lord, I pray for my city, my town, my village. May it be a prosperous and peaceful place where people of all cultures and ethnicities can live in harmony. May the Shalom of God find rest here.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.'
Jeremiah 29:4-7

What word or phrase jumped out at me from these verses?

I notice two phrases. 'Plant gardens', 'Increase in number'. In these words, there are echoes of Eden. God is saying to his exiled people, 'You are here now, so make Babylon into a garden Paradise – a place where God's presence can dwell. Be fruitful! Increase! Multiply! Grow!'

What an amazing thought: Even in the worst of places and situations, the people of God are called to prosper and grow in number; and together seek the peace and prosperity of where they are. Not waiting for things to get back to normal; seeking God's shalom right here and now.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Father, I yield myself to You and the way You are shaping me through the disruptions and limitations in my life. May I find Your shalom where I am, with all its noise, dirt, and inconvenience.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in Philippians 4:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

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.

[July 28 2021 \(click for audio\)](#)

Peacer Under Pressure

Today is Wednesday the 28th of July, and this week we are exploring the ancient Hebrew ide of Shalom.

At the heart of Lectio 365 are six practices, and so this week we are exploring shalom as it relates to the practice of prayer.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of Shalom, I offer You my worries, I bring You my brokenness and I surrender my striving. As I rest in Your presence, I receive Your peace.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*The Lord is my shepherd;
I have all that I need.
He lets me rest in green meadows;
he leads me beside peaceful streams.
He renews my strength.
He guides me along right paths,
bringing honor to his name.
Psalm 23:1-3*

Pause and pray

After eating the Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus said, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled.' (John 14:1). Then, just before he prayed his great farewell prayer, John records these words of Jesus...

'Do you now believe?' Jesus replied. 'A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'
John 16:31-33

When Jesus says, 'Do not let your heart be troubled', the Greek word is tarasso, meaning disturbed or agitated. When he says, 'In this world you will have trouble' (v33), the Greek word is thlipsis, which means pressure. In other words, Jesus says, although I may face all kinds of trouble and pressure on

the outside, I don't have to get agitated on the inside. In the world there will always be pressure. In Jesus I will always find peace.

Ask

What am I more conscious of right now; is it the pressure of the 'world' or the peace that is in Jesus?

Pause and pray

I think of someone I know who is feeling overwhelmed by the troubles and pressures of life right now.

Father, help them to step out of the pressure around them. May their agitated heart find peace in the heart of Jesus.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

'Do you now believe?' Jesus replied. 'A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'

John 16:31-33

'Take heart!' Jesus says. Or as another translation puts it, 'Cheer up!' (v16 WEB) It reminds me of God's words to Joshua after the death of Moses, 'Be strong and courageous.' (Josh 1:9) This is not over-blown self-confidence. Jesus doesn't call me to 'fake it till I make it'. I know I'm going to experience pressure in this world. But Jesus has already conquered the world, and, no matter what my circumstances, I can live confidently and cheerfully and experience his peace, knowing that 'every little thing gonna be alright.' *

*Bob Marley, Three Little Birds lyrics, © Odnil Music Ltd., Fifty Six Hope Road Music Ltd., Blackwell Fuller Music Publishing Llc

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord Jesus, I yield myself to Your world-conquering peace. I abandon my timid uncertainty and take heart! As I face the day ahead, I choose the way of Jesus – to take courage and cheer up!

Yielding Promise

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

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you 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.

July 29 2021 (click for audio)

Martha & Mary: Heroes of Hospitality

Today is thursday the 29th of July, the feast of Mary and Martha, close companions of Jesus.

On Feast Days we pause from our usual 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. These are: Prayer and Creativity, Justice and Hospitality, Learning and Mission.

Today therefore, we are thanking God for the attentiveness of Martha and Mary, heroes of hospitality.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's welcome today, joining with 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

Martha and Mary are two of the only women named in the gospels who are friends of Jesus; they eat with him and spend time together. Martha and Mary are also sisters, who are well known for their differing styles of hosting and welcoming...

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has

chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38-42

Martha and Mary are very often pitted against one another; with Martha's distracted nature as wrongdoing, and Mary presented as the 'better' sister. But looking at the passage again, I learn about the unique personalities of Martha and Mary and their welcome of Jesus.

Mary's devotion to Jesus is immediately obvious; but she is also breaking with the standard custom of the day; usually it was only men who learned from rabbis. By sitting at Jesus' feet, Mary isn't just being an unhelpful sibling; she is also defying cultural norms. And so Jesus' response, 'it will not be taken away from her' isn't just for Martha's ears. In another story, we similarly read of Mary's radical attitude as she uses expensive perfume and her hair to anoint Jesus' feet (John 12). Mary demonstrates her love in a whole-hearted way, defying what's usually acceptable or 'normal' in her welcome of Jesus.

In contrast, Martha's gift of hospitality can be overlooked in this story, when Jesus comes to her house to teach. She opens her home to Jesus (v38) and as the host, she is performing duties that are typical and needed. And when her brother Lazarus dies, Martha is the one who walks to greet Jesus where He is. Martha is consistent and loving, using her gifts and the resources that she has to serve and welcome Jesus.

Even in their differences, Martha and Mary teach me the significance and importance of paying attention to Jesus; to serve, welcome and prioritize Him.

Ask

What does it look like for me to welcome Jesus today? Do I need to do something with the skills I have? Or perhaps I need to stop my normal routine and simply sit at His feet?

Jesus, help me to welcome You; to pay attention to where You are and to know how to respond.

Pause and pray

What is Jesus welcoming me into, today? Perhaps like Martha, to serve someone, or like Mary, to demonstrate my devotion to Him with boldness.

Jesus, I ask that You show me how I can partner with You today, and show others who You are.

Pause and pray

Yield

The French monk and author of Practice of the Presence of God, Brother Lawrence, writes about the importance of welcoming God:

'He is always with you. Just as you would be rude if you deserted a friend who was visiting you, why would you be disrespectful of God by abandoning His presence? Do not forget Him! Think of Him often. Adore Him ceaselessly. Live and die with Him. That is the real business of Christians; in a word,

it is our profession. If we do not know it, we must learn it.’*

*Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God (1982) p51

My greatest calling is to be a companion of Jesus; like Martha and Mary, to invest my time, energy and devotion in Him.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I’m sorry when I forget to welcome You; when my mind is distracted by many things or when my heart is focused on other priorities. I refocus my attention on You, and only You.

Yielding Promise

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

...just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13:34-35

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.

July 30 2021 (click for audio)

The God of Peace

Today is Friday the 30th of July, and this week we are exploring the ancient Hebrew idea of Shalom and how it relates to the practice of prayer.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

God of Shalom, I offer You my worries, I bring You my brokenness and I surrender my striving. As I rest in Your presence, I receive Your peace.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's protection today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 37...

*The Lord rescues the godly;
he is their fortress in times of trouble.
The Lord helps them,
rescuing them from the wicked.
He saves them,
and they find shelter in him.
Psalm 37:39-40*

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on Paul's urgent request for prayer support from believers in Rome: men and women whom he had never met...

*I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there, so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen.
Romans 15:30-33*

The practice of Sabbath reminds me that there is a kind of peace that only comes after hard work. 'Strive with me in prayer', Paul writes. In Greek, agonizomai - Literally, 'agonize' with me". It is a word borrowed from the world of athletics; describing the discipline of an Olympic athlete determined to win a race. 'Come and train in the prayer-gym with me' Paul says, And then, when we have finished this race together, I'll come and see you; we can celebrate victory, and I will rest with you.'

Ask

Am I a prayer athlete or a spectator? What race is in front of me this week?

Lord, teach me to strive in prayer, to agonize well. But also to make time to celebrate and rest well with You.

Pause and pray

I think of someone I know who may be feeling weary as they run the race, someone with a great task to accomplish for the Kingdom. I 'join them in their struggle' by praying 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.

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there, so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Romans 15:30-33

'The God of peace be with you all.' This is the very heart of Shalom. By faith in Christ I have peace with God. Living in Christ I experience the peace of God. Now, as I join the struggle as a prayer-athlete, Paul suggests that I may know, not just the peace of God, but the God of peace himself.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I'm tempted to approach life as a spectator and not an athlete. To act like what I do makes no difference to the outcome of the race. Teach me to persevere in prayer, to 'run to win' (1 Cor. 9:24). I yield myself to the struggle of an athlete with a glorious race in front of 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 Matthew:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.

July 31 2021 (click for audio)

Ignatius of Loyola – Hero of Learning and Prayer

Today is Saturday the 31st of July, the feast of Ignatius of Loyola who died on this day in 1556.

On Feast Days we pause from our usual 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. These are: Prayer and Creativity, Justice and Hospitality, Learning and Mission.

And so today, we are thanking God for Ignatius of Loyola, a devoted hero of learning and prayer.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

P.R.A.Y Pause Reflect Ask Yield

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's attentiveness today, 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

Pause and pray

Ignatius of Loyola was born in the Basque region of Spain and had high hopes to be a soldier and achieve great things. However, during a battle against the French he became seriously injured when hit by a cannonball. His condition was so serious they thought he would die, but incredibly, Ignatius survived.

Housebound, Ignatius began to read books about the life of Jesus and the saints. He was so inspired by what he found he totally changed the direction of his life.

He traveled to Montserrat, Northern Spain, where he spent time confessing his sins, selling his possessions and spending hours each day in prayer.

Ignatius spent years in study, and along the way gained a group of followers who formed the Society of Jesus (known today as the Jesuits) in 1540.

One day, whilst sitting on the banks of the Cardoner river, 'the eyes of his understanding began to open'* and he began to write The Spiritual Exercises, a book that became influential worldwide.

*Ignatius of Loyola, The Autobiography of St Ignatius of Loyola, p30

The exercises Ignatius developed are creative ways to become aware of God's presence, reflect and welcome the inner work of the Spirit, transforming us more and more into the image of Christ. One well-known exercise he developed is called 'The Examen' - a way to prayerfully reflect with God at the end of the day. (Lectio 365 Night Prayers draw inspiration from this approach!)

Another 'Ignatian' way to pray is 'Imaginative Prayer'; engaging with scripture in a creative way.

Today, to celebrate this hero of faith, I pause now to pray imaginatively through a passage of scripture.

I begin my first reading by familiarizing myself with the story, paying attention to who is involved and what happens...

One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and started out. As they sailed across, Jesus settled down for a nap. But soon a fierce storm came down on the lake. The boat was filling with water, and they were in real danger. The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves. Suddenly the storm stopped and all was calm.

Luke 8:22-25 (NLT)

Pause and Pray

Now, I return to the passage a second time and notice the details of the story: the time of day; the environment; the emotions of the disciples; the actions of Jesus...

One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and started out. As they sailed across, Jesus settled down for a nap. But soon a fierce storm came down on the lake. The boat was filling with water, and they were in real danger. The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves. Suddenly the storm stopped and all was calm.

Luke 8:22-25 (NLT)

Pause and pray

As I return to the passage one last time, I imagine myself in the story; with the disciples in the boat, experiencing the sights, smells, emotions and experience as it unfolds...

One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and started out. As they sailed across, Jesus settled down for a nap. But soon a fierce storm came down on the lake. The boat was filling with water, and they were in real danger. The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves. Suddenly the storm stopped and all was calm.

Luke 8:22-25 (NLT)

Pause and Pray

What struck me from this imaginative reading of scripture? What do I want to say to God?

Yielding Prayer

*Today, I yield to You God with the words of Ignatius of Loyola's prayer 'Suscipe'**, meaning 'to receive':*

*** <https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/prayer/traditional-catholic-prayers/saints-prayers/suscipe-prayer-saint-ignatius-of-loyola>*

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.*

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...

*[I can be] confident of this, that he who began a good work in [me] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
Philippians 1:6*

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.