

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

December 2022

December 1	December 2	December 3	December 4
December 5	December 6	December 7	December 8
December 9	December 10	December 11	December 12
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Audio for Each Day in MP3 Format

Month of December 2022

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December 01 2022 (click for audio)

You Make Me Come Alive

Today is Thursday the 1st of December, and this Advent we are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus by reflecting on the people included in His story. This week we are listening to the voices of the prophets as they describe the coming Messiah.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*Sing to the one who rides across the ancient heavens,
his mighty voice thundering from the sky.
Tell everyone about God's power.
His majesty shines down on Israel;
his strength is mighty in the heavens.
Psalm 68:33-34 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Today I consider how the promised Messiah is full of the Spirit of God.

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him –
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD –
and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.
Isaiah 11:1-3a (NIV UK)*

In Luke 4:18, Jesus ascribes this passage, and another, Isaiah 61, to Himself, saying 'the Spirit of the Lord is on me.' I take a few moments now to consider Jesus: full of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. What facet of God's Spirit do I feel most in need of today, and why?

Pause and pray

Ask

I take a few moments to thank the Holy Spirit for that part of the Spirit's nature. Perhaps I repeat it quietly to myself.

Holy Spirit, thank You for Your wisdom. You are wisdom to me.

Pause and pray

What is God's invitation to me today, wrapped up in that dimension of God's Spirit? Is there something God wants me to believe about Himself or myself, something God wants me to do in response to this passage?

Pause and pray

Is there someone around me who needs to be filled with God's Holy Spirit? In the quiet I pray for them now, and in my mind's eye I imagine them being filled and receiving all of God's good Gifts.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him –
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD –
and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.
Isaiah 11:1-3a (NIV UK)*

In the gardens at Waverley Abbey there is a massive stump of a seemingly dead tree. A leafy new shoot is springing from it - a constant reminder that the Messiah was, and is, in the business of making all things new.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I yield to You all the parts of my heart and my life that feel cut back like that stump, those places where perhaps I even feel dead. Thank You that You are the resurrection, and that You make me come alive again.

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:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!
2 Corinthians 5:17 (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.

December 02 2022 (click for audio)

The Messiah Isn't PC

Today is Friday the 2nd of December, and this week we are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus by listening to the voices of the prophets as they describe the coming Messiah.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's righteousness today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 89...

Powerful is your arm!

Strong is your hand!

Your right hand is lifted high in glorious strength.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne.

Unfailing love and truth walk before you as attendants.

Psalm 89:13-14 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Yesterday I considered how the promised Messiah was full of God's Spirit. Today I reflect on the fruit of His Spirit-filled life.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,

or decide by what he hears with his ears;

but with righteousness he will judge the needy,

with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;

with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

Righteousness will be his belt

and faithfulness the sash round his waist.

Isaiah 11:3b-5 (NI UK)

The spirit of every age seeks to define right and wrong by its own standards. But the promised Messiah doesn't take the world at face value, rather He sets a plumb line of righteousness, truth, and faithfulness.

Ask

Lord, are there any ways I have allowed the spirit of the age to influence me unduly, perhaps through advertisers, social media influencers, or public opinion? In the quiet, I ask You, Spirit of truth, to reveal lies I may be believing, and to guide me into all truth.

Pause and pray

Lord, as I pray for my friends today I echo Pauls' prayer in Philippians.

May their, 'love abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that [they] may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.'
(Phil. 1:9-11 NIV UK)

Pause and pray

Yield

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

*He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash round his waist.*
Isaiah 11:3b-5 (NIV UK)

Being the Prince of Peace does not make the Messiah passive. On the contrary, the language the prophet Isaiah uses is rigorous. Jesus the Messiah is on a mission; He's dressed for work, and He means business!

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, Messiah, I want to see the way You see, and I want to do the things You do. Your eye is on the poor and Your heart is for the needy. May mine be as well.

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:

*...loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke..
set the oppressed free
and break every yoke...
Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.
Isaiah 58:6b,8 (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.

December 03 2022 (click for audio)

Hero or Zero?

Today is Saturday the 3rd of December, and this week we are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus by listening to the voices of the prophets as they describe the coming Messiah.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

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

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

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on one last Messianic promise in the book of Isaiah.

*'Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.
He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
he will not falter or be discouraged*

till he establishes justice on earth.

In his teaching the islands will put their hope.'

Isaiah 42:1-4 (NIV UK)

In this prophecy, we see a Messiah who is bent on justice, but we also begin to see the unexpected means by which He attains it - through suffering.

I love the idea of a Messiah who comes as a superhero to triumph over evil, to make everything that is wrong right again. But a Messiah who suffers? And furthermore invites me to share in His suffering. Hmmm, I'm not so sure about that!

Ask

Jesus, have I only received You as a hero, and not as a suffering servant? I don't want to miss Your presence in my life because You don't fulfill all my Messianic expectations. Help me to lean into the mystery of a God who triumphs through suffering.

Pause and pray

Father, I pray for the diaspora of Jewish people all over the world - the children of Israel - who are still the apple of Your eye and dear to Your heart. Would you answer their longing for a promised Messiah. Reveal Jesus, I pray.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

*'Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.
He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.
In his teaching the islands will put their hope.'*
Isaiah 42:1-4 (NIV UK)

Isaiah gives us a little peek into the affection that exists within the Trinity. The Father has chosen the Son and delights in Him. The Hebrew word delight means that He has set His affection on the Messiah,

that He enjoys Him. The primary work of Jesus the Messiah is to reconcile us to God so that we also can enter into His affection, so that we also can be enjoyed by God.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Father, this really stirs my heart. Miraculously, I am invited to be a recipient of Your delight! I take a minute now and savor the sweetness of Your loving invitation.

Yielding Promise

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

Yet the Lord set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you...
Deuteronomy 10:15 (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.

December 04 2022 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Prayer for Advent

Today is Sunday the 4th of December, the second Sunday of Advent. Together, as we prepare to celebrate the arrival of Jesus, we have been listening to the voices of the people caught up in the Christmas story. In December as we pray with prophets, mothers, shepherds, widows, Magi, priests, and angels, we pause each Sunday to return to our Advent Sabbath prayer.

This has been an exceptionally tumultuous year, full of unexpected dangers and uncertainties. But today, on this Advent Sabbath, I put aside every anxious thought and, pausing to be still, I pray in the words of Psalm 85...

*Show us your unfailing love, LORD,
and grant us your salvation.
I will listen to what God the LORD says;
he promises peace to his people...
Psalm 85:7-8 (NIV UK)*

And so, I prepare my heart for Christ's coming.

Pause and pray

In the book of Revelation, John writes,

*...and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:
'The kingdom of the world has become
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah,
and he will reign for ever and ever.'
Revelation 11:15 (NIV UK)*

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'
He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'
Revelation 21:3-5 (NIV UK)*

Advent is a season of waiting and desiring, and of hope-filled longing as I invite Christ to come again into my life and into our beautiful but broken world. I pause now to listen once again to that voice from heaven saying:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

The world is a hubbub of competing voices, while from the heavenly throne comes a voice which cuts through all the worrisome chatter of the earth:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

Turning my attention to my own heart, I become aware of my fears, weaknesses, and the brokenness of my thoughts, words, and actions. Lord, I turn to You once again and I listen for Your promise:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

I think now of the needs in my community and my nation. Lord, I pray for those who have been profoundly affected by war: for refugees, the displaced and the traumatized. I pray for everyone who is desperately struggling financially. And I pray for our government, that they may act with great wisdom in these challenging times. But beyond all these troubles I listen for Your loud voice of hope, declaring:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

Finally, Lord, I pray for the nations of the world, especially those caught up in conflict and war. In this Advent season I pray, come Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace; I listen expectantly to hear Your voice from the throne announcing:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

Thank You, Father, that You sent Your Son to save us.

May the hope of Jesus be born again amongst us this Christmas.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You will come again in glory.

That all the kingdoms of this world will be Your kingdom.

And that every eye will see it.

We long for You to return and make everything new.

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for filling me afresh.

May the life of Christ be born again in me today.

A Sabbath Blessing

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

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

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

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

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

Amen*

* Adapted from 'Sabbath blessing', Pete Greig, petegreig.info.

December 05 2022 (click for audio)

Zechariah Regains His Voice

Today is Monday the 5th of December. Throughout this season of Advent we are reflecting on the voices of the many individuals whose experiences come together to make up the Christmas story. This week we are reflecting on the words of some of the men whose lives became entangled with the birth of the Messiah.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's care for me today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 31...

*I will be glad and rejoice in your unfailing love,
for you have seen my troubles,
and you care about the anguish of my soul.*

*You have not handed me over to my enemies
but have set me in a safe place.*

Psalm 31:7-8 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on a man who had lost his voice. Zechariah was a priest. Though he and his wife were well into old age, an angel had told him they would have a son, to be named John. But because Zechariah doubted his words, the angel had rendered Zechariah unable to talk...

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, 'No! He is to be called John.'

They said to her, 'There is no one among your relatives who has that name.'

Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, 'His name is John.' Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.

Luke 1:59-64 (NIV UK)

Zechariah's disbelief had caused him to lose his voice. What holds me back from speaking about God?

Like Zechariah, do I have doubts about God's power or promise? Or questions that I can't find answers to? Perhaps I worry about how people will respond if I dare to share my faith.

Ask

Lord Jesus, I bring my doubts and insecurities to You now. Lead me into a deeper trust in You. May I see the fulfillment of Your promises to me just as Zechariah did.

Pause and pray

Zechariah was an older man, and though he had family and community, I am struck by the fact that loneliness and isolation can be an increasing problem for many older people today. Many feel voiceless and ignored.

Lord, I pray for the older people in my community. May Your church be a place of friendship and support across generations, where the voice of the elderly is treasured.

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.

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, 'No! He is to be called John.'

They said to her, 'There is no one among your relatives who has that name.'

Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, 'His name is John.' Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.

Luke 1:59-64 (NIV UK)

When John was born, tradition demanded that a baby be named after a family member. Yet it is only as Zechariah dares to defy the expectations of others, in order to obey God, that his voice returns. Is there something God is asking me to do which I have been avoiding because it may go against the expectations of those around me?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, instead of worrying about what other people will think of me, I choose to obey You today. Give me courage to raise my voice and take risks for 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 Joshua:

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 1:9b (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.

December 06 2022 (click for audio)

Zechariah's Praise

Today is Tuesday the 6th of December. Throughout this season of Advent we are reflecting on the voices of the many individuals whose experiences come together to make up the Christmas story.

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

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's goodness today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 31...

*How great is the goodness
you have stored up for those who fear you.
You lavish it on those who come to you for protection,
blessing them before the watching world.
You hide them in the shelter of your presence,
safe from those who conspire against them.
You shelter them in your presence,
far from accusing tongues.
Psalm 31:19-20 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

God had sent an angel to Zechariah with wonderful news: the miraculous conception of a son who would herald the Messiah! But Zechariah had doubted and was struck supernaturally silent. Now, surrounded by his friends and family, his power of speech returns....

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

*'Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a horn of salvation for us*

*in the house of his servant David
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us –
to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.’
Luke 1:67-75 (NIV UK)*

To have been rendered silent must have been profoundly intense - especially as it came as a result of disbelief - but in Zechariah it does not seem to have produced any fear of God. In fact his words encourage me to serve God ‘without fear’. While I am mindful of the phrase that’s translated in many Bibles as ‘fearing the Lord’, I’m reminded that this does not mean living in terror of him.

Ask

Like Zechariah, do I feel secure and safe in God’s love, or am I worried about God’s anger or judgment?

Good Father, help me to take Zechariah’s words to heart - that I can serve You free of all fear! Reveal more of Your love and set me free from my worries.

Pause and pray

Lord, I call to mind someone I know who suffers from anxiety. Cut through their fears today and anchor them deeply in Your love. May they come to experience the joy and security that knowing Jesus brings.

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.

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

*‘Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us –*

*to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.'*
Luke 1:67-75 (NIV UK)

Zechariah's enforced silence must have been extremely frustrating, yet his first words have nothing to do with the hardship he's endured. Instead, he focused on building up the faith of his neighbors. How do I respond when I experience difficulties? Will I turn my attention inwards, focusing on my problems, or will I choose to look outwards and build up my community?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

*Lord, Your call to love my neighbor applies whether I am in an easy season of life or a hard one.
Whatever my situation today, I choose to trust that I am always secure in Your love, and I commit to
building up the faith of those around 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 Romans:

*... that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future,
nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to
separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
Romans 8:38b-39 (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.

December 07 2022 (click for audio)

Zechariah's Prophecy

Today is Wednesday the 7th of December. Throughout this season of Advent we are reflecting on the voices of the many individuals whose experiences come together to make up the Christmas story. This week we are reflecting on the words of some of the men whose lives became entangled with the birth of the Messiah.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's instruction, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 119...

*Now let your unfailing love comfort me,
just as you promised me, your servant.
Surround me with your tender mercies so I may live,
for your instructions are my delight.
Psalm 119:76-77 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Zechariah the priest hasn't spoken a word for nine months, but at the birth of his son John, his mouth has been opened. Zechariah's first words were a prophetic outpouring of comfort addressed to his whole community, but now his attention turns to his son...

*'And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.'
Luke 1:76-79 (NIV UK)*

As he grew up, I wonder how often John contemplated the words his father prayed over him as an infant. As an adult he faced extreme hardship in his mission to prepare the nation for Jesus. Surely this prophetic vision statement, given by the Holy Spirit, helped him stay true to his calling. Do I have a Zechariah figure in my own life, someone God has used to speak to me in a clear and powerful way?

Ask

Lord, thank You for the words of life You've given to me through others. Bring to my heart and mind now a key encouragement someone has shared with me that will sustain me in my walk with You today.

Pause and pray

Lord, I name a child or young person that I know. Would You open their ears today to hear Your word and grasp Your love for them. May they recognize Your voice guiding them all the days of their life.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

*'And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.'*
Luke 1:76-79 (NIV UK)

While these words were inspired by the Holy Spirit, they came to John because Zechariah opened his mouth and spoke. John's own mission required him to talk publicly to prepare the way for Jesus. How willing am I to open my mouth and share Jesus with people?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Dear Lord, I have a relationship with You because of the people who dared to share Your story with me. I choose to do the same today. Give me courage to speak Your words of life to those around 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:

'...do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.'

Matthew 10:19b-20 (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.

December 08 2022 (click for audio)

Actions Speak Louder

Today is Thursday the 8th of December. Throughout this season of Advent we are reflecting on the voices of the many individuals whose experiences come together to make up the Christmas story.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's word today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 119...

*Your commandments give me understanding;
no wonder I hate every false way of life.
Your word is a lamp to guide my feet
and a light for my path.
Psalm 119:104-105 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Today's passage doesn't record a single word spoken by the man at its center. And yet the choices he makes speak volumes about his character....

*This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: his mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.
But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'
When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.
Matthew 1:18-21,24 (NIV UK)*

While I don't have a record of Joseph's words, there's one thing I do know: he said, 'Yes'. Fearing that his fiancée had been unfaithful, Joseph's future must have felt hopeless. It would have been easy for him to dismiss the angelic dream as just that ... a dream, the wishful thinking of his subconscious mind. That Joseph had the faith to say yes to God's view of the situation, shows me how I can move forward when I face a crisis.

Ask

Are there any situations in my life that currently appear hopeless? A broken relationship perhaps, or a great injustice that I cannot see a way to resolve?

God of miracles, I bring You that which seems hopeless. Like Joseph, please change my perception of this situation to see where You are at work.

Pause and pray

Father, I pray for Christians who serve You by helping families in difficult situations; social workers, pastors and others. When faced with difficult or painful circumstances today, please speak to them by Your Holy Spirit. Inspire them with solutions to problems that seem insurmountable, solutions that bring Your peace and healing to people in need.

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 how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: his mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-21,24 (NIV UK)

While the news of Mary's pregnancy must have been incredibly distressing, Joseph did not respond with an outburst of public anger. By choosing silence, he avoided causing trouble for Mary and made space in his heart for God to speak. When I am wronged, it is very tempting to lash out, but Joseph reminds me that knowing when to be silent is as important as knowing when to speak out.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Dear Lord, when I am hurt by others, I choose to quiet my soul to seek Your voice. In refusing to strike back, help me create space in my mind to receive Your direction, just as Joseph did.

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 Joel:

*I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.
Joel 2:28-29 (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.

December 09 2022 (click for audio)

Herod's Words

Today is Friday the 9th of December. Throughout this season of Advent we are reflecting on the voices of the many individuals whose experiences come together to make up the Christmas story.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*Soon the wicked will disappear.
Though you look for them, they will be gone.
The lowly will possess the land
and will live in peace and prosperity.
Psalm 37:10-11 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

It is easy to sanitize the Christmas story, to reduce it to a sentimental nativity play. But the insecure and murderous King at the center of today's reading reminds me that Christ was born into the real world, with all of its cruelty and unfairness.

*When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him...
Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.'
... When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.
Matthew 2:3,7-8,16 (NIV UK)*

King Herod, a puppet ruler installed by the Roman Empire, responded to the birth of the true King, Jesus, with a fit of jealousy and ordered the killing of children. While I wish that such injustices were consigned to history, stories of present-day atrocities, carried out on the orders of powerful people,

reach me almost daily. I want to do more than just rage at such actions, so I ask myself, what concrete steps can I take today to help those affected by war or injustice.

Pause and pray

Ask

Prince of Peace, I want to stand against the Herods of this world. Where can I offer my skills, money and time to help those who are suffering under tyrants? Are there any refugees in my community I could help or is there a charity or organization you'd like me to support?

Pause and pray

While Herod ordered the killings, they were carried out by other people, those who said yes to his demands instead of telling him no.

Liberator God, I pray for those brave souls who are standing up to oppressive regimes all around the world. Strengthen their resolve and protect them today. Embolden them and others to say no to modern-day Heroes.

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 King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him ...

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

... When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Matthew 2:3,7-8,16 (NIV UK)

Fearing for his status as king, Herod's charming, friendly words gave way to a temper tantrum when he was denied what he wanted. I take this chance to examine my own ego and my own temper. How quickly do harsh words or violent actions rise up in my heart when my pride is wounded or my wants are frustrated?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

King Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve, show me where entitlement or superiority have taken root in my heart so that I can dig them out. Once again, I choose to deny myself so I can follow You in bringing healing to a broken 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 the book of Revelation that:

'He will wipe every tear from [our] eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things [will] pass away.

Revelation 21:4 (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.

December 10 2022 (click for audio)

Simeon's Gratitude

Today is Saturday the 10th of December. Throughout this season of Advent we are reflecting on the voices of the many individuals whose experiences come together to make up the Christmas story.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's faithfulness today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 89...

I will sing of the LORD's unfailing love forever!

Young and old will hear of your faithfulness.

Your unfailing love will last forever.

Your faithfulness is as enduring as the heavens.

Psalm 89:1-2 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the fulfillment of a promise that has been a long time coming...

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,

you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

For my eyes have seen your salvation,

which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

a light for revelation to the Gentiles,

and the glory of your people Israel.'

Luke 2:25-32 (NIV UK)

I live in a culture of instant gratification; of swipe-left dating and one-click purchases. I have been conditioned to expect to get what I want, when I want it. So if I don't see a quick fulfillment of a promise from God, I can be tempted to dismiss it as somehow untrue or to doubt God's goodness towards me. Simeon reminds me that the promises God makes will be fulfilled, but the timing of that fulfillment is not up to me.

Ask

Lord God, for whom a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day (2 Peter 3:8) my hope is in You now and forever. Today, as I remember the promises I am waiting for You to fulfill, deepen my knowledge of Your goodness and faithfulness as I wait.

Pause and pray

While Simeon's age isn't mentioned in the passage, Christian tradition holds that he was an elderly man. I think now of an older Christian in my life, a spiritual father or mother who has pointed me to Jesus.

Lord God, I hold this hero of the faith before You. In their remaining time on Earth, I ask that their best days may still be ahead of them. Speak to them as You did to Simeon and use them powerfully to encourage others to Follow You.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

*'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.'*

Luke 2:25-32 (NIV UK)

Having seen the infant Jesus, Simeon now had to face up to the end of his life. Knowing he'd remain alive until this moment, his days had been unusually secure. Beyond this point, his future became uncertain. And yet he greeted this uncertainty with joy because he understood that his life was part of God's unfolding plan of salvation.

How do I deal with uncertainty in my life, especially when the assumptions I've relied on are suddenly taken away?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, when my circumstances become uncertain, I want to grow in the certainty that You are good and that You love me. However my future plays out, I chose to trust that it is bound up in Your story of salvation.

Yielding Promise

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

[be] confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6 (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.

December 11 2022 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Prayer for Advent

Today is Sunday the 11th of December, the third Sunday of Advent. Together, as we prepare to celebrate the arrival of Jesus, we have been listening to the voices of the men caught up in the Christmas story. As we pray with prophets, mothers, shepherds, widows, Magi, priests, and angels, we pause each Sunday to return to our Advent Sabbath prayer.

This has been an exceptionally tumultuous year, full of unexpected dangers and uncertainties. But today, on this Advent Sabbath, I put aside every anxious thought and, pausing to be still, I pray in the words of Psalm 85...

*Show us your unfailing love, LORD,
and grant us your salvation.
I will listen to what God the LORD says;
he promises peace to his people...
Psalm 85:7-8 (NIV UK)*

And so, I prepare my heart for Christ's coming.

Pause and pray

In the book of Revelation, John writes,

*...and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:
'The kingdom of the world has become
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah,
and he will reign for ever and ever.'
Revelation 11:15 (NIV UK)*

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'
He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'
Revelation 21:3-5 (NIV UK)*

Advent is a season of waiting and desiring, and of hope-filled longing as I invite Christ to come again into my life and into our beautiful but broken world. I pause now to listen once again to that voice from heaven saying:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

The world is a hubbub of competing voices, while from the heavenly throne comes a voice which cuts through all the worrisome chatter of the earth:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

Turning my attention to my own heart, I become aware of my fears, weaknesses, and the brokenness of my thoughts, words, and actions. Lord, I turn to You once again and I listen for Your promise:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

I think now of the needs in my community and my nation .Lord, I pray for those who have been profoundly affected by war: for refugees, the displaced and the traumatized. I pray for everyone who is desperately struggling financially. And I pray for our government, that they may act with great wisdom in these challenging times. But beyond all these troubles I listen for your loud voice of hope, declaring:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

Finally, Lord, I pray for the nations of the world, especially those caught up in conflict and war. In this Advent season I pray, come Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace; I listen expectantly to hear Your voice from the throne announcing:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

Thank You, Father, that You sent Your Son to save us.
May the hope of Jesus be born again amongst us this Christmas.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You will come again in glory.
That all the kingdoms of this world will be Your kingdom.
And that every eye will see it.
We long for You to return and make everything new.

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for filling me afresh.
May the life of Christ be born again in me today.

A Sabbath Blessing

May this day bring Sabbath rest to my heart and my home.
May my peace and perspective be renewed in the busyness of this season.
May my hand be free enough from spending and acquiring to receive Your gift.
May a little of the wonder and magic of Christmas awaken the child within me today.

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

* Adapted from 'Sabbath blessing', Pete Greig, petegreig.info.

December 12 2022 (click for audio)

Jesus' Human Ancestry

Today is Monday the 12th of December and this Advent we are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus by reflecting on the people included in His story. So far, we've listened to the voices of the prophets who described the Messiah to come. Last week we listened to the voices of the men caught up in the Christmas story. This week we are listening to the voices of the women who played important roles in the human ancestry of Jesus.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in the anticipation of Christ's arrival today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 96...

*Let the heavens be glad, and the earth rejoice!
Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise!
Let the fields and their crops burst out with joy!
Let the trees of the forest sing for joy
before the LORD, for he is coming!
Psalm 96:11-13a (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Matthew's Gospel begins in an unexpected way. Before launching into the drama of the Christmas story, the author takes the time to list Jesus' ancestral line...

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

*Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,
Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,
Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,*

*Nahshon the father of Salmon,
Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,
and Jesse the father of King David.
David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife.
Matthew 1:1-6 (NIV UK)*

Ancient Middle Eastern genealogies aren't like modern family trees. They traced the male family line and included or excluded generations depending on what the author wanted to emphasize.* Matthew carefully crafted this genealogy. For his original readers, ancestors like Abraham and David were part of Jesus' Jewish and Messianic credentials, but the inclusion of four women in Matthew's list would have been a surprise.

*Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), pp. 50-53.

In the ancestry of Jesus, Matthew names: Tamar, a widow who seduced her father-in-law in order to seek justice (Gen. 38); Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute who helped the Israelites take Jericho (Josh. 2); Ruth, a Moabite widow who chose her mother-in-law and Israel's God over her own people (Ruth); and Bathsheba, a widow whose husband was murdered so King David could take her to be his wife (2 Sam. 11).

Ask

By including these women, Matthew highlights difficult or shocking stories from Israel's past. I think about my past, my family. I remember the people and events that have been painful or difficult, things that I would prefer to edit out of my history...

Pause and pray

Father God, I hold these names and events before You. If You can bring something so healing and good from the difficulties of Jesus' human family, would You do the same with mine.

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 the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

*Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,
Perez the father of Hezron,*

*Hezron the father of Ram,
Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,
Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,
and Jesse the father of King David.
David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife.
Matthew 1:1-6 (NIV UK)*

The stories of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba are messy and uncomfortable. Each of them experienced great grief and loss, and some were caught up in scandal. Yet each woman showed great determination in the face of adversity and was ultimately restored to family and community. What does it say about God that He chose to include these women in the human ancestry of His Son?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Father God, thank You for welcoming me into Your family. I am messy and imperfect, but I offer You my whole self, the entirety of my story, and I ask You to weave me into Your mission of restoration.

Yielding Promise

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

I am no longer a foreigner and stranger, but a fellow citizen with God's people and also a member of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

Ephesians 2:19-20 (NIV UK)

(Adapted into the first person)

Closing Prayer

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

December 13 2022 (click for audio)

The Voice of Tamar

Today is Tuesday the 13th of December. This week, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we are exploring the stories of the women Matthew included in Jesus' genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17).

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 each woman's story. '**A**': **ASKING** God to help us and others and '**Y**': **YIELDING** to His will in our lives, come what may.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*Day by day the LORD takes care of the innocent,
and they will receive an inheritance that lasts forever.
They will not be disgraced in hard times;
even in famine they will have more than enough.
Psalm 37:18-19 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Today I reflect on the first woman Matthew named in Jesus' lineage. Tamar is the daughter-in-law of Judah. After the death of her first husband, she was married to Judah's middle son. After his death, Judah avoids marrying Tamar to his youngest son, as was the custom, instead sending her back to her family. Abandoned, but determined to seek justice, Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute and Judah sleeps with her...

About three months later Judah was told, 'Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant.'

Judah said, 'Bring her out and let her be burned to death!'

As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. 'I am pregnant by the man who owns these,' she said. And she added, 'See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are.'

Judah recognized them and said, 'She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah.' And he did not sleep with her again.

*When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb.
Genesis 38:24-27 (NIV UK)*

This is an uncomfortable story. Widowed women were particularly vulnerable in ancient patriarchal societies. The loss of their husbands also meant the loss of home, provision, safety, and family. That's why God's law instructed that widows should be married to their brothers-in-law. It was for their protection and so children could be born to the name and inheritance of the deceased (Deut. 25:5-10).

Judah breaks this law and abandons Tamar, leaving her without hope or a stable future. He won't take responsibility for Tamar's life but, when he believes Tamar has sinned, he's quick to pronounce judgment and death.

Ask

Tamar had very little power, so in desperation took drastic action to secure her future. Is there an area of my life where I feel desperate or powerless right now?

Father, give me hope and a solution for my situation.

Pause and pray

Prostitution is still part of my society today.

Father, I pray for sex workers working online, in brothels, or on the streets of my community. Show them Your unfailing and unconditional love. Protect them, provide for them and open up new possibilities 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.

About three months later Judah was told, 'Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant.'

Judah said, 'Bring her out and let her be burned to death!'

As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. 'I am pregnant by the man who owns these,' she said. And she added, 'See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are.'

Judah recognized them and said, 'She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah.' And he did not sleep with her again.

*When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb.
Genesis 38:24-27 (NIV UK)*

‘Although in my world Tamar’s actions would be reprehensible,’ writes author Sandra Richter, ‘in her own culture it was Judah who was worthy of rebuke ... Judah was the villain; Tamar was the courageous (albeit a bit audacious!) heroine.’*

*Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), p. 33.

By naming Tamar in Jesus’ genealogy, Matthew welcomes the abandoned and vulnerable into the Christmas story (Matt. 1:3).

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, I confess that I can be a bit like Judah: quick to judge someone’s choices when I don’t understand their situation. Teach me to see people the way You do 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 Romans:

*Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Romans 8:34-35a (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.

December 14 2022 (click for audio)

The Voice of Rahab

Today is Wednesday the 14th of December. This week, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we are reflecting on the surprising women Matthew included in Jesus' family line (Matt. 1:1-17).

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*The LORD has announced his victory
and has revealed his righteousness to every nation!
He has remembered his promise to love and be faithful to Israel.
The ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.
Psalm 98:2-3 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Today I reflect on the second woman Matthew names in the ancestral line of Jesus. Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute from Jericho, chose to protect Israel's spies as they prepared to attack her city...

Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, 'I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts sank and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

'Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them – and that you will save us from death.'

Joshua 2:8-13 (NIV UK)

Rahab, a Gentile by birth and a prostitute by profession, is the last person the Israelites would have expected to be an ally. But Kenneth Bailey notes that, somehow, she ‘...discovered that the God of the Israelites was the one true God and decided to serve him alone. That discovery led her to...’ put her life on the line and, ‘On the basis of her new faith, she acted against her community, its gods and its leaders.’*

*Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*(London: SPCK, 2008), p. 39

Ask

What is the biggest risk I have taken for God? Is God inviting me to risk something for His plans and purposes today?

Lord, give me the courage of Rahab.

Pause and pray

I don’t know whether Rahab learned about Israel through gossip or prophetic revelation, but either way she knew about God before a single Israelite set foot in her city.

Lord, I name a family or community who don’t yet know You. Whether by word of mouth or supernatural intervention, prepare one of them to welcome me as I share the gospel with them.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, ‘I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts sank and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

‘Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them – and that you will save us from death.’

Joshua 2:8-13 (NIV UK)

Jericho was conquered, Rahab was spared and became part of God’s family: a first fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that all people would be blessed through Israel (Gen. 12:3).** Rahab’s inclusion in the family line of Jesus (Matt. 1:5) reminds me that it’s only by faith in the God of ‘heaven above and on the earth below’ (Josh. 2:11), that I too am saved and welcomed into God’s people.

****John Paul Heil, 'The Narrative Roles of the Women in Matthew's Genealogy', Biblica 72, No. 4 (1991), (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters Publishers) p. 540.**

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God of heaven and earth, in the busyness of this Advent season, I remember who You are, and all You've done for me. In my own words I pause to express my praise...

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's Gospel:

*[Jesus] came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.
John 1:11-12 (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.

December 15 2022 (click for audio)

The Voice of Ruth

Today is Thursday the 15th of December. This week, as we prepare for Christmas, we are exploring the stories, and listening to the voices of the women Matthew named in Jesus' family line (Matt. 1:1-17).

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*For the LORD delights in his people;
he crowns the humble with victory.
Let the faithful rejoice that he honors them.
Let them sing for joy as they lie on their beds.
Psalm 149:4-5 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Today I listen to the third woman Matthew highlighted in the human ancestry of Jesus. Ruth was a Moabite widow who left her own land to follow her widowed, Jewish mother-in-law back to Israel. Without family, protection or provision, these two women took great risks to secure a new future...

One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, 'My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing-floor. Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing-floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.'

'I will do whatever you say,' Ruth answered. So she went down to the threshing-floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

Ruth 3:1-6 (NIV UK)

Ruth had nothing; even the food she gathered was dependent on the kindness of a stranger (Ruth 2). Yet, in her grief and poverty, Ruth chose to put her trust in Naomi, and in Naomi's God. When her mother-in-law told Ruth to risk everything to appeal to Boaz, a distant relative she knew little about, Ruth displayed her trust in Naomi through risky obedience.

Ask

Father God, it's easy to talk about trusting You, but it's frightening to put that trust to the test. I talk to You now about a need in my life. Give me direction. In the words of Ruth, 'I will do whatever You say.'

Pause and pray

Many news outlets and financial experts are predicting a global recession in 2023.

God my provider, I pray for the people in my nation who are already struggling financially, including those, like Ruth, who aren't sure where their next meal will come from.

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.

One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, 'My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing-floor. Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing-floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.'

'I will do whatever you say,' Ruth answered. So she went down to the threshing-floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

Ruth 3:1-6 (NIV UK)

Naomi's risky plan paid off. Instead of taking advantage of the vulnerable Ruth, Boaz married her, even though it was costly. Through his redemptive generosity, a Gentile woman went from the grip of poverty to the embrace of family. And the child, born through Ruth's trust and Boaz's mercy, became the grandfather of King David and an ancestor of Jesus.*

* Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), p. 42.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I lack Naomi's courage, Ruth's obedience, and Boaz's sacrificial generosity. I choose to trust You to meet all my needs today. I repeat Ruth's words, as much to myself as to You, 'I will do whatever You say'.

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's Gospel:

If I remain in Jesus and his words remain in me, I can ask whatever I wish, and it will be done for me.

John 15:7 (NIV UK)

(Adapted into the first person)

Closing Prayer

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

being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,

being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost,

proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.

Amen.

December 16 2022 (click for audio)

The Voice of Bathsheba

Today is Friday the 16th of December. This week, as we prepare for Christmas, we are listening to the voices of the women Matthew named in Jesus' ancestral line (Matt. 1:1-17).

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's mercy today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 51...

You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one.

You do not want a burnt offering.

The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit.

You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

Psalm 51:16-17 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the story of the fourth woman highlighted in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:6). Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, has a painful and tragic story...

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman washing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, 'She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.' Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, 'I am pregnant.'

2 Samuel 11:1-5 (NIV UK)

Some have suggested that Bathsheba seduced David, but as I read her story I wonder, what power did she have to refuse a king? The Bible is silent on Bathsheba's thoughts, yet it's vocal about David's

choices and God's judgment of them (2 Sam. 11:27; 12:1-10).^{*} Whether what happened with David was consensual or not, Bathsheba found herself in an incredibly vulnerable position: pregnant by a man who was not her husband.

^{*}See Wim J. C. Weren, 'The Five Women in Matthew's Genealogy', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (April 1997), p. 300 and Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Editors), *Women's Bible Commentary*, Third Edition: Revised and Updated, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press 2012, eBook), p. 159.

Ask

David broke three of God's ten commandments in his interactions with Bathsheba (Exod. 20:13,14,17). Instead of loving his neighbor, he selfishly took what he wanted.

Lord, I ask You to show me where I have failed to love my neighbor. As I confess now, I gratefully receive Your forgiveness.

Pause and pray

The World Health Organization estimates that about 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced either physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.**

^{**}'Violence against women', 9 March 2021, World Health Organization (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>) (accessed on 03.11.22).

Lord, I name someone I know who has survived physical abuse or unwanted sexual attention. Draw near to 'the broken-hearted and [heal] those who are crushed in spirit' (PSALM 34 :18)

Pause and pray

Yield

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

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman washing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, 'She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.' Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, 'I am pregnant.'

2 Samuel 11:1-5 (NIV UK)

David makes a bad situation worse by murdering Bathsheba's husband and taking her as his wife. Yet when God confronts David, he immediately and profoundly regrets what he's done and repents before

God (2 Sam. 12). By including David and Bathsheba in the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew is underlining that there is forgiveness and redemption for everyone in God's great salvation plan.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Today, Lord, I yield to You with David's prayer of repentance:

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

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in 1 John:

*...if I admit my sins—simply come clean about them—God won't let me down; he'll be true to himself. He'll forgive my sins and purge me of all wrongdoing.
1 John 1:9 (MSG)
(Adapted into the first person)*

Closing Prayer

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

December 17 2022 (click for audio)

The Voice of Mary

Today is Saturday the 17th of December. This week, as we prepare for Christmas, we are reflecting on the women Matthew named in Jesus' ancestral line (Matthew 1: 1-17)

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's salvation today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Mary, the mother of Jesus...

*...the Mighty One is holy,
and he has done great things for me.
He shows mercy from generation to generation
to all who fear him.
His mighty arm has done tremendous things!
He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.
He has brought down princes from their thrones
and exalted the humble.
Luke 1:49-52 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

This week I have reflected on the stories of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba, the first four women Matthew highlights in the lineage of Jesus. Today I return to Matthew's genealogy and focus on the final woman through whom God's salvation plan was birthed...

*After the exile to Babylon:
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,
Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,
Abihud the father of Eliakim,
Eliakim the father of Azor,
Azor the father of Zadok,
Zadok the father of Akim,*

*Akim the father of Elihud,
Elihud the father of Eleazar,
Eleazar the father of Matthan,
Matthan the father of Jacob,
and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is
called the Messiah.*

Matthew 1:12-16 (NIV UK)

The women named in Jesus' ancestry include Jews and Gentiles. Some were poor and powerless and all of them were vulnerable. Yet each one played a part in God's salvation story. Now, as I reflect on Mary, the theologian Lucy Peppiatt reminds me that she was not 'simply a receptacle of the divine, housing [Jesus], as it were. She supplies his humanity from her own body. Her blood forms him, her food nourishes him, her breasts feed him.'*

*Lucy Peppiatt, *Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women*(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), p. 30.

Ask

I pause to consider the miracle of the eternal Son of God, being formed as a human infant in a teenage mother's womb...

Pause and pray

I've seen many serene depictions of Mary holding her baby. But my memories of the early days of parenthood are far from peaceful.

Lord, I name someone I know who is experiencing both the joy and the exhaustion of caring for a newborn. Give them strength, sleep, and a fresh understanding of the Father's love.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

*After the exile to Babylon:
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,
Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,
Abihud the father of Eliakim,
Eliakim the father of Azor,
Azor the father of Zadok,
Zadok the father of Akim,
Akim the father of Elihud,
Elihud the father of Eleazar,*

*Eleazar the father of Matthan,
Matthan the father of Jacob,
and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is
called the Messiah.*

Matthew 1:12-16 (NIV UK)

Mary did not ask to be the mother of the Messiah, but when she learned of God's plan for her through the angel Gabriel, she chose to say yes. Mary's attitude challenges me: though carrying Jesus would impact her body, her family, and her reputation, she said, 'I am the Lord's servant ... May your word to me be fulfilled' (Luke 1:38 NIV UK).

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, as I celebrate Your birth this Christmas I want to learn from Your mother. Through every nativity play and stable scene I see, remind me to put my trust in You, no matter what You ask 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 Isaiah:

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.*

*And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.*

Isaiah 9:6-7a (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.

December 18 2022 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Prayer for Advent

Today is Sunday the 18th of December, the fourth Sunday of Advent. Together as we prepare to celebrate the arrival of Jesus, we have been listening to the voices of the people caught up in the Christmas story. As we pray with prophets, mothers, shepherds, widows, Magi, priests, and angels, we pause each Sunday to return to our Advent Sabbath prayer.

This has been an exceptionally tumultuous year, full of unexpected dangers and uncertainties. But today, on this Advent Sabbath, I put aside every anxious thought and, pausing to be still, I pray in the words of Psalm 85...

*Show us your unfailing love, LORD,
and grant us your salvation.
I will listen to what God the LORD says;
he promises peace to his people...
Psalm 85:7-8 (NIV UK)*

And so, I prepare my heart for Christ's coming.

Pause and pray

In the book of Revelation, John writes,

*...and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:
'The kingdom of the world has become
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah,
and he will reign for ever and ever.'
Revelation 11:15 (NIV UK)*

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'
He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'
Revelation 21:3-5 (NIV UK)*

Advent is a season of waiting and desiring, and of hope-filled longing as I invite Christ to come again into my life and into our beautiful but broken world. I pause now to listen once again to that voice from heaven saying:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

The world is a hubbub of competing voices, while from the heavenly throne comes a voice which cuts through all the worrisome chatter of the earth:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

Turning my attention to my own heart, I become aware of my fears, weaknesses, and the brokenness of my thoughts, words, and actions. Lord, I turn to You once again and I listen for Your promise:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

I think now of the needs in my community and my nation. Lord, I pray for those who have been profoundly affected by war: for refugees, the displaced and the traumatized. I pray for everyone who is desperately struggling financially. And I pray for our government, that they may act with great wisdom in these challenging times. But beyond all these troubles I listen for Your loud voice of hope, declaring:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

Finally, Lord, I pray for the nations of the world, especially those caught up in conflict and war. In this Advent season I pray, come Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace; I listen expectantly to hear Your voice from the throne announcing:

I am making everything new!

Pause and pray

*Thank You, Father, that You sent Your Son to save us.
May the hope of Jesus be born again amongst us this Christmas.*

*Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You will come again in glory.
That all the kingdoms of this world will be Your kingdom.
And that every eye will see it.
We long for You to return and make everything new.*

*Thank You, Holy Spirit, for filling me afresh.
May the life of Christ be born again in me today.*

A Sabbath Blessing

May this day bring Sabbath rest to my heart and my home.
May my peace and perspective be renewed in the busyness of this season.
May my hand be free enough from spending and acquiring to receive Your gift.
May a little of the wonder and magic of Christmas awaken the child within me today.
And may God's Word feed me and His Spirit lead me into the week and into the life to come.
Amen*

* Adapted from 'Sabbath blessing', Pete Greig, petegreig.info.

December 19 2022 (click for audio)

Good News

Today is Monday the 19th of December, just six days to Christmas. Throughout this very special week we are going to be exploring the many ways in which the voice of heaven speaks life and light into our world at Christmas.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Lord, in this busy season, help me now to be truly still. I open my ears to hear Your word and quietly prepare my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's amazing nearness today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 28...

Praise the LORD!

For he has heard my cry for mercy.

The LORD is my strength and shield.

I trust him with all my heart.

He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy.

I burst out in songs of thanksgiving.

Psalm 28:6-7 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the story of Christmas from the perspective of the shepherds. It's a cold and quiet night, the stars are out, and I can see the breath of the restless sheep. And then came the voice from heaven:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.'

Luke 2:8-10 (NIV UK)

This is simultaneously the most terrifying and the most wonderful moment of the shepherds' lives. In a time of great anxiety, the angel speaks words of peace and joy: 'I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.' The message of Christmas is good news not bad news; it's joy, great joy; and it's for everyone, everywhere, forever. This past year has been one of unusual anxiety. Today I

consider these words as though I am one of the shepherds. What might good news of great joy mean for me in my life today?

Ask

The prolific hymn-writer, Isaac Watts, struggled with mental illness throughout his life, yet he wrote some of our most joyful hymns. Taking the lyrics of his song 'Joy to the World', I make them my own today:

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing...**

**[https://hymnary.org/text/joy to the world the lord is come](https://hymnary.org/text/joy_to_the_world_the_lord_is_come)*

Lord Jesus, I prepare room within my own cluttered heart for Your coming this Christmas. Be born again in me I pray.

Pause and pray

The angel says, 'Do not be afraid!' *Thinking now of those known to me who are deeply anxious today, I ask You to speak unexpected words of hope and joy into their lives this Christmas.*

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I imagine the expressions on the faces of the shepherds as they hear these words for the very first time:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.'
Luke 2:8-10 (NIV UK)

Good news! Great joy! This is the daily invitation of God to me. St Seraphim of Sarov said that 'The Holy Spirit turns to joy whatever he touches.'**

** St Seraphim of Sarov (Orthodox Church; 1759-1833), 'Conversation with Nicholas Motovilov', [On the Acquisition of the Holy Spirit.](#)

I often find myself surprised by the depth of joy, the laughter of the Holy Spirit, the voice of heaven in my life. I am reminded of the words of the American poet Mary Oliver:

If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it.

...Don't be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.***

*** Mary Oliver, 'Don't Hesitate', *Swan: Poems and Prose Poems* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2010)

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

*Holy Spirit,
Giver of joy
You carry good news for all people.
Show me how to delight in the joy of Your presence
Today and always.*

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 16:

*No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice.
My body rests in safety...
You will show me the way of life,
granting me the joy of your presence
and the pleasures of living with you forever.
Psalm 16:9,11 (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.*

December 20 2022 (click for audio)

Glory to God

Today is Tuesday the 20th of December, just five days until Christmas. This week we are exploring the many ways in which the voice of heaven speaks life and light into our world at Christmas.

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

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Lord, in this busy season, help me now to be truly still. I open my ears to hear Your word and quietly prepare my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

For your unfailing love is as high as the heavens.

Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.

Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens.

May your glory shine over all the earth.

Psalm 57:10-11 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the words of the angels, spoken to the shepherds, announcing the arrival of Christ, the newborn King:

‘This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’

Luke 2:12-14 (NIV UK)

A baby, lying in a manger. I have become so familiar with this story that I forget to be shocked by it. ‘This is the staggering message of Christ’s incarnation: God’s glory became dirt so that we—the scum of the earth— might become the very glory of God.

‘This then is our creed. We believe in the blasphemous glory of Immanuel; “infinity dwindled to infancy,”* as the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins puts it.

* Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems*. (London: Humphrey Milford, 1918; Bartleby.com, 1999).

We believe in omnipotence surrendering to incontinence, the name above every other name rumored to be illegitimate. We believe that God’s eternal Word once squealed like a baby and, when eventually he learned to speak, it was with a regional accent. The Creator of the cosmos made tables, and presumably he made them badly at first. The Holy One of Israel got dirt in the creases of his hands.’**

** Pete Greig, *Dirty Glory: Go Where Your Best Prayers Take You* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016), p. 3.

Ask

Lord Jesus, my life often feels cold, dark, and dirty, like the unwelcoming space in which You were born. I often feel unworthy, inadequate, and ashamed. And yet this is all I have to offer. And so, confessing my sin to You now, I prepare my heart to host Your coming this Christmas.

Pause and pray

I think of the deep prejudices in my world towards those on the margins. I pray that You would reveal even the slightest attitude of superiority in my heart. Show me, Lord, how I can love and serve someone who might otherwise be ignored or despised this Christmas.

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 will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’
Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,
‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’
Luke 2:12-14 (NIV UK)*

I often find it easier to acknowledge my sense of unworthiness than to accept this idea of God’s unmerited favor resting upon my life. Finding a mirror, or looking at a reflection now, I repeat these surprising words a few times over myself: ‘God’s favor rests on me.’

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

*Holy Spirit,
Come rest on me today,*

*In my grit and glory.
Give me the faith to believe
in Your peace and kindness
this Christmas season.*

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:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.
John 14:27 (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.*

December 21 2022 (click for audio)

Shepherds Become Heaven's Messengers

Today is Wednesday the 21st of December, just four days until Christmas. This week we are exploring the many ways in which the voice of heaven speaks life and light into our world at Christmas.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Lord, in this busy season, help me now to be truly still. I open my ears to hear Your word and quietly prepare my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*The Lord gives the word,
and a great army brings the good news...
Praise the Lord; praise God our savior!
For each day he carries us in his arms.
Psalm 68:11, 19 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Today I return to the bewildered shepherds who are reeling from the message the angels have just spoken:

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'
So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.
When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.
Luke 2:15-18*

I love the heart-led immediacy of how the shepherds respond. They didn't just receive the voice of heaven as a personal spiritual epiphany - an intimate moment with the Lord. Instead they obeyed immediately. There's a sense of momentum and intentionality. Their vision of Jesus was simply too good to keep to themselves; they hurried to spread the word to anyone who would listen.

Ask

Who might I invite to hear the amazing news of Jesus this Christmas? I pray for courage, and opportunity.

Pause and pray

Two billion people - more than one quarter of the world's population – will attend Christmas services and other events this week. I pray now for pastors and priests preparing their sermons, that they will truly be voices of heaven, communicating the gospel with clarity and conviction.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I imagine the expression upon Mary's face as these burly shepherds rushed in, and out, of the room.

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'
So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.
When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.
Luke 2:15-18*

I am struck by how 'all who heard [the shepherds' words] were amazed'. I wonder: am I still genuinely excited by the gospel message? Have I lost my sense of amazement? The African American pastor, Shadrach Meshach Lockridge, once preached an hour-long sermon about the wonder of Jesus, which concluded with a spontaneous eulogy which has thrilled millions ever since. I allow his words to stir my heart afresh:

*My King is the King.
He's the key to knowledge.
He's the wellspring to wisdom.
He's the doorway of deliverance.
He's the pathway of peace.
He's the roadway of righteousness .
He's the highway of holiness.
He's the gateway of glory
Do you know Him?**

* Dr. S. M. Lockridge, 'That's My King', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZoOW3NW0Jw>
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/well-i-wonder-if-you-know-him/>.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, I thank You

*That You have invited me to be a messenger of Your gospel,
to know and be known by You.*

*I give You my time, my words, my hurry today,
and I ask for a renewed sense of wonder in Your presence.*

Yielding Promise

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

But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: if you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:8-9 (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.

December 22 2022 (click for audio)

Attentive to the Stars

Today is Thursday the 22nd of December and there are just three days left until Christmas. This week we are exploring the many ways in which the voice of heaven speaks life and light into our world at Christmas.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Lord, in this busy season, help me now to be truly still. I open my ears to hear Your word and quietly prepare my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's endless compassion, His absolute power, and His incomprehensible wisdom, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 147...

*He heals the brokenhearted
and bandages their wounds.
He counts the stars
and calls them all by name.
How great is our Lord! His power is absolute!
His understanding is beyond comprehension!
Psalm 147:3-5 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Today I join the three eastern astronomers visiting Jesus some two years after his birth - a moment traditionally associated with the Christmas story:

*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'
When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.
Matthew 2:1-3 (NIV UK)*

The Magi were truth seekers from a nation far away from Israel. It was their intellectual and scientific questioning that had led them to Jesus. Some people are feelers, but others are thinkers. For every person led to the Lord by their heart, someone else arrives in the same place through a process of serious, considered exploration - even if they arrive there a couple of years later! God doesn't ask us to kiss our brains goodbye in order to become Christians. Quite the reverse. Some of the greatest

intellects of all time, from Saint Augustine to Sir Isaac Newton, have been committed followers of Christ.

Ask

‘What is the fruit of study?’ asks one ancient catechism. ‘To perceive the eternal Word of God reflected in every plant and insect, every bird and animal, and every man and woman.’*

* Ray Simpson with Brent Lyons-Lee, *St Aidan’s Way of Mission* (Abingdon, Oxon: BRF, 2016) p. 47.

Where might I find Christ today in my work, or in the people I meet, or in the natural world around me?

Pause and pray

I pray today for artists, scientists and intellectuals who are not afraid to address matters of faith: brilliant women and men such as the podcaster Malcolm Gladwell, the scientist Francis Collins, and the novelist Marilynne Robinson. I ask You, Lord, to bless the thinkers I know with fresh clarity and courage as they consider Your truth this Christmas

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 Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

Matthew 2:1-3 (NIV UK)

I see the intention in the way the Magi from the east traveled to find Jesus, surely at great cost in both time and expense. There’s a line at risk of becoming twee which is often used in Advent; it simply says: ‘wise men still seek Him’. What form does my seeking take? What is the nature of my intellectual pursuit? Am I still being stretched in my thinking? I take time now simply to ask the Lord questions.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

I pray an ancient prayer from Augustine, one of the greatest intellects of all time:

*‘Those who seek the Lord shall praise Him. For those who seek shall find Him (Matt. 7:7) and those who find Him shall praise Him. Let me seek You, Lord, in calling on You, and call on You in believing in You; for You have been preached unto us. O Lord, my faith calls on You — that faith which You have imparted to me, which You have breathed into me through the incarnation of Your Son.’***

** St Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 1, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110101.htm>.

Yielding Promise

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

“His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’”

Acts 17:27-28 (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.

December 23 2022 (click for audio)

God Speaks Through the Magi's Dreams

Today is Friday the 23rd of December, and Christmas is just two days away. This week we re exploring the many ways in which the voice of heaven speaks life and light into our world at Christmas.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Lord, in this busy season, help me now to be truly still. I open my ears to hear Your word and quietly prepare my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

I will praise you every day;

yes, I will praise you forever.

Great is the LORD! He is most worthy of praise!

No one can measure his greatness.

Let each generation tell its children of your mighty acts;

let them proclaim your power.

Psalm 145:2-4 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I follow the story of the Magi, wise men from the east who travel from afar to find the young Christ in Bethlehem:

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

Matthew 2:9-12 (NIV UK)

The gifts presented to Jesus here are all highly significant: gold honors His majesty, frankincense speaks of the aroma of prayer and worship rising to heaven, and myrrh was a burial spice - such a strange gift for a two-year-old and yet a prophecy of the cross.

Ask

What is the costliest or most significant gift I might give to Christ this Christmas? I take a moment to reflect...

Pause

*What can I give him?
Poor as I am
If I were a shepherd
I would give a lamb
If I were a wise man
I would do my part
But what I can I give him
Give him my heart.**

** Gustav Holst / Christina Georgina Rossetti / Anna Rice, In the Bleak Midwinter (Lyrics © Universal Classics & Jazz A.d.o. Univers, Fox Music, Integrity's Hosanna! Music, First Name Music Limited, Novello And Co Ltd., Iq Music Ltd).*

Pause and pray

It's interesting how often God used dreams to direct the events around Christ's birth, and it remains a frequent feature in the conversion stories of countless people in many parts of the world today. Thinking of someone known to me who is seeking God's guidance, or who doesn't yet know Jesus, I simply ask the Holy Spirit to speak to them supernaturally this Christmas.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I try to imagine the range of emotions Mary was experiencing in this moment:

*After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.
Matthew 2:9-12 (NIV UK)*

I imagine Mary frantically trying to tidy the house for these important strangers who arrived unannounced. I imagine her surprise and delight at the gift of actual gold! And then her distress at the inappropriateness of a burial spice given to her beautiful baby. I pause now to pray for mothers in these busy days before Christmas, with all the joy, and emotional complexity of this season.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

*Deep peace of the running wave to you,
Deep peace of the flowing air to you,
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you,
Deep peace of the Flock of Stars to you,
Deep peace from the Son of Peace to you,
Deep peace, deep peace!***

*** Fiona Macleod, 'Deep Peace', The Dominion of Dreams: Under the Dark Star (William Sharp, 1895).*

Yielding Promise

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

The LORD replied, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'
Exodus 33:14 (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.

December 24 2022 (click for audio)

Christmas Eve

It's Christmas Eve. Throughout this week we've been listening to the voice of heaven speaking life and light into the darkness and death of our world in this very special season.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Lord, in this busy season, help me now to be truly still. I open my ears to hear Your word and quietly prepare my heart for the wonder of Your coming at Christmas.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

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

Pause and pray

On the eve of Christmas, I take this time now to remember the heart of it all, joining Joseph and a heavily pregnant Mary as they arrive in Bethlehem:

*In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.
So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.
Luke 2:1-5 (NIV UK)*

Mary must have been utterly exhausted. Joseph was certainly deeply stressed. And yet the very things that seemed to be going so wrong - the timing of the census, the journey nine months pregnant, the lack of a place to stay - were the very things that would be celebrated for generations to come. Here, in their moment of despondency and despair, they stand on the very cusp of the greatest miracle of all time.

Ask

On this Christmas Eve we will frame our prayers around three particular carols being sung today all over the world: 'Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem', 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing', and 'Silent Night'.

I love that line from 'Oh Little Town of Bethlehem' which describes how 'the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.'* And so I pause now before You Lord to name my hopes and fears for the coming holiday.

*https://hymnary.org/text/o_little_town_of_bethlehem

Pause

And now I focus my prayers on that line from Charles Wesley's great anthem 'Hark! the herald angels sing' – 'Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!'"** Who do I know that desperately needs to be reconciled with the Lord this Christmas? I pray for them now.

**https://hymnary.org/text/hark_the_herald_angels_sing_glory_to

Pause and pray

Yield

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

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

Luke 2:1-5 (NIV UK)

I am reminded of the pilgrimage of Mary and Joseph, especially on a day like today when so many millions are undertaking arduous journeys for Christmas. I'm conscious of the loneliness and dislocation Mary and Joseph must have felt. And so I pray for those who will be alone or will feel dislocated this Christmas - far from home literally, or within their own hearts.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

I yield myself today to the Lord Jesus Christ, in the words of one of the best-loved carols of all time:

*Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
radiant beams from thy holy face
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,*

*Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.****

***https://hymnary.org/text/silent_night_holy_night_all_is_calm_all

Yielding Promise

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

"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.

John 14:1-3 (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.

December 25 2022 (click for audio)

Sabbath Prayer for Christmas

Today is Sunday the 25th of December, and so it's my great joy, on behalf of the whole team here at Lectdio365, to wish you a very happy Christmas!

Thank you for making time on such a busy day to remember what it's all about by pausing to pray in this way.

*Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,
Born this happy morning;
Jesus, to Thee be all glory given;
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing
Oh come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.**

*https://hymnary.org/text/o_come_all_ye_faithful_joyful_and_triumph

The prophet Isaiah, writing some seven centuries before Christ, first uttered the famous lines which will resound around the world today:

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
(Isaiah 9:6, NIV UK)*

I recognize my need for the Prince of Peace today. How easily I can become selfish, impatient or resentful, even on Christmas Day! How quickly I can be robbed of the joy of the birth of Christ as King. And so I take a moment now to anticipate the day ahead, noticing its pressure points, considering the people I will meet, the challenging moments I may face, and acknowledging before the Lord who loves me any worries I am secretly carrying.

Pause and pray

Having prayed for myself, I name those known to me who particularly need the guidance of a Wonderful Counsellor, the love of an Everlasting Father, and the peace of the Prince of Peace in their lives Today.

Pause and pray

Writing from a concentration camp during the Second World War, the German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflected on the significance of Christmas Day:

*Out of love for human beings, God becomes a human being... This is about the birth of a child, not of the astonishing work of a strong man, not of the bold discovery of a wise man, not of the pious work of a saint. It really is beyond all our understanding: the birth of a child shall bring about the great change, shall bring to all mankind salvation and deliverance. ***

**** Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *God Is In the Manger*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).**

I pause now to pray for those who are suffering today, as Bonhoeffer suffered then - for those in the war zones of our world, including Ukraine and Yemen. I ask the One with the 'government upon His shoulders' to intervene, inviting the Prince of Peace to visit frightened soldiers, bereaved loved ones, and the millions of displaced people.

Pause and pray

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into this very special day, the Lord who loves me speaks to my soul, saying:

'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.'

John 14:27 (NIV UK)

Pause

Christmas Blessing***

And so, may the extraordinary love by which the Father sent His Son at Christmas, embrace my family and friends, my heart and my home, this day.

And may the astounding sacrifice, by which Jesus was born in Bethlehem, mark all my attitudes, actions and interactions this day.

And may the irrepressible joy, by which the Spirit conceives and breathes new life, fill me with the holiness of heaven's happiness now and forever more.

Amen

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

December 26 2022 (click for audio)

God's Presence

Today is Monday the 26th of December, and it's the final week of 2022. Throughout this week, we're going to be reflecting on the year just gone and looking forward to the new year ahead, adapting an ancient Christian method of prayer, known as the Examen, which was developed by Ignatius of Loyola in the sixteenth century. We begin today by recognizing where God has been present with us this year.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Loving Father, please help me to be still. I open my ears to hear You now and I quietly prepare my heart for all that You have for me as I approach the new year.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice that God is with me today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 16...

*You will show me the way of life,
granting me the joy of your presence
and the pleasures of living with you forever.
Psalm 16:11 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Today, I am reflecting on one of David's most well-known and well-loved Psalms, as paraphrased by Eugene Peterson in The Message Bible.

*Is there anyplace I can go to avoid your Spirit?
to be out of your sight?
If I climb to the sky, you're there!
If I go underground, you're there!
If I flew on morning's wings
to the far western horizon,
You'd find me in a minute—
you're already there waiting!
Then I said to myself, "Oh, he even sees me in the dark!
At night I'm immersed in the light!"
It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you;*

night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you.

Psalms 139:7-12 (MSG)

Not only did God create everything, but God created me. Not only does God know everything, but God knows me. And not only is God everywhere, but God is with me.

The Examen involves remembering the events and the experiences, the places where I've been and the people that I've been with, and it involves inviting the Holy Spirit to help me become aware of God's presence in, and over, and through it all.

Ask

And so, I take a few moments to think back over 2022. What were the memorable moments? What were the highlights and the encouragements? What were the challenges? What did I find difficult?

Loving Father, show me where You were present with me this year, particularly when things were difficult.

Pause and pray

Turning my prayers outwards, I think about my close friends and family, those who I have shared this past year with.

Loving Father, whatever they remember of this past year, I pray that they become aware that You have been with them.

Perhaps I could find a time to pray with them before the end of the Year.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Is there anyplace I can go to avoid your Spirit?

to be out of your sight?

If I climb to the sky, you're there!

If I go underground, you're there!

If I flew on morning's wings

to the far western horizon,

You'd find me in a minute—

you're already there waiting!

Then I said to myself, "Oh, he even sees me in the dark!"

At night I'm immersed in the light!"

It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you;

night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you.

Psalms 139:7-12 (MSG)

‘Learning to find God in all things comes with practice and spiritual attentiveness, but it also comes with discernment,’ writes David Benner. ‘This brings us back to the crucial role of the examen ... Any experience can be examined to discover the presence of God. Learning to become aware of God’s presence in the midst of our daily experience is to know that we are not alone.’*

* David G. Benner *Opening To God*, (Westmont, IL: IVP USA, 2010), pp. 152-153.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Loving Father, I yield myself to Your presence today. You have been with me, You are with me, and You promise to be with me forever. Help me to become more aware of Your presence in the midst of my daily experience.

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.

December 27 2022 (click for audio)

Emma Cotton: Hero of Prayer and Mission

Today is Tuesday the 27th of December, Feast of the evangelist and preacher Emma Cotton who died in 1952 – seventy years ago today. On Feast Days we pause from our usual rhythms to celebrate the stories and learn from the lives of heroes of faith, whose collective witness embodies our six practices at the heart of Lectio 365. These are: prayer and creativity, justice, and hospitality, learning and mission. Today therefore we are thanking God for the extraordinary example of Emma Cotton, a bold hero of prayer and mission.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

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

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's guiding presence today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 73...

*You guide me with your counsel,
leading me to a glorious destiny.
Whom have I in heaven but you?
I desire you more than anything on earth.
My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak,
but God remains the strength of my heart;
he is mine forever.
Psalm 73:24-26 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Born to a Creole family in Louisiana in 1877, Emma Cotton first came to prominence during the Azusa Street Revival of 1906, which, from a run-down building in Los Angeles, launched the worldwide Pentecostal movement.

As men and women prayed fervently, desiring to live holy lives, they began to experience the empowering presence of the Spirit. Right from the start of the revival, the leader, William J. Seymour, the son of liberated African American slaves, welcomed women to the Azusa Street pulpit as well as men, sending them out as missionaries and church planters. "It is contrary to the Scriptures", he wrote, "that woman should not have her part in the salvation work to which God has called her... It is

the same Holy Spirit in the woman as in the man.”*

* From an untitled article in The Apostolic Faith (Los Angeles: 1.12, January 1908)

<https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/women-in-the-pentecostal-movement/>

Emma Cotton went on to found at least eight Pentecostal congregations both in Los Angeles, and in and around Oakland in Northern California, before later handing them on to the Church of God in Christ.

Many had been offended when they saw that God was using African Americans, and especially women, in this fresh move of the Spirit. But gospel-mothers like Emma Cotton continued to play a strategic role in the initial revival and beyond, helping to spread the message to the world.

Ask

I am inspired by the boldness of Emma Cotton, a woman who, in the face of a culture which would have confined her to insignificance, pushed back, not for her own glory, but for the sake of the gospel.

Lord, may I always listen to your invitation, and not to the voices – including those in my own head – telling me what I cannot do.

Pause and pray

Father, I pray for a fresh move of Your Holy Spirit throughout the global Church. Raise up men and women like Emma Cotton to lead the way. Awaken and empower us to love You and share Your Gospel with others.

Pause and pray

Yield

Reflecting on her experiences of the Azusa Street revival, Emma Cotton wrote;

*‘When the power fell, people left their big churches and temples and went to that old barn to pray. The lame, the halt and the blind came and God healed them. It was a common thing to have three or four messages from the word in one meeting. The saints were so saturated with the power of God that the thing swept the city and oh, how the power fell.’***

*** Estrela Alexander (2012), The Women of Azusa Street (Kindle Edition). Seymour Press. P.161*

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I yield myself to your love and Your power today. I give myself again to your purpose. Come Holy Spirit and fill me afresh with your presence.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in 1 John:

*God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them...
There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.
1 John 4:16,18 (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.*

December 28 2022 (click for audio)

Give Thanks

Today is Wednesday the 28th of December. Throughout this week, we are reflecting on the year just gone and looking forward to the new year, adapting an ancient method of prayer known as the Examen.

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, as we review the year with gratitude, ‘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

Loving Father, please help me to be still. I open my ears to hear You now and I quietly prepare my heart for all that You have for me as I approach the new year.

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 9...

*I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart;
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.
I will be glad and rejoice in you;
I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.
Psalm 9:1-2 (NIV UK)*

Pause and pray

Today, we are reflecting on one of the many Psalms that overflow with thanksgiving and praise...

*Give thanks to the LORD and proclaim his greatness.
Let the whole world know what he has done.
Sing to him; yes, sing his praises.
Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds.
Exult in his holy name;
rejoice, you who worship the LORD.
Search for the LORD and for his strength;
continually seek him.
Remember the wonders he has performed,*

his miracles, and the rulings he has given.

Psalm 105:1-5 (NLT)

My mother recalls that when I was a child, our bedtime prayers would often go on and on, because I insisted on thanking God for everything. ‘Thank You God for the chairs... Thank You God for my bed... Thank You God for the curtains...’ and so on. I’m choosing to believe that this was an early sign of a deeply grateful life, rather than a cunning attempt to delay bedtime.

Today’s Psalm is an example of the second stage of the Examen, which is all about cultivating an attitude of gratitude.

Ask

And so, I take a few moments to think back over 2022. What, or who, am I thankful for? (Flicking through the photos on my phone might trigger a few memories.)

I pray a few of my own simple, ‘Thank You God for...’ prayers right now.

Pause and pray

I think particularly of the people who encouraged me this year. Who was there when I needed help? Whose words or actions inspired me to become a better me this year?

I take a few moments to give thanks to God for these people.

Is there some way that I could express my thanks to them today?

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Give thanks to the LORD and proclaim his greatness.

Let the whole world know what he has done.

Sing to him; yes, sing his praises.

Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds.

Exult in his holy name;

rejoice, you who worship the LORD.

Search for the LORD and for his strength;

continually seek him.

Remember the wonders he has performed,

his miracles, and the rulings he has given.

Psalm 105:1-5 (NLT)

‘The foremost quality of a trusting disciple is gratefulness,’ writes Brennan Manning. ‘Gratitude arises from the lived perception, evaluation, and acceptance that all of life is grace – as an undeserved and

unearned gift from the Father's hand. Such recognition is itself a work of grace, and acceptance of the gift is implicitly an acknowledgment of the Giver. The grateful heart cries out each morning, "Thank you, Lord, for the gift of a new day."*

* Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2002). pp. 24-25.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord God, I use this prayer as my own, as I remember 2022 with gratitude... Thank You, Lord, for the gift of each and every day, and the gifts within each day too.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me reminds me in 1 Thessalonians to:

Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.
1 Thessalonians 5:18 (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.

December 29 2022 (click for audio)

A Time For Reflection

Today is Thursday the 29th of December. Throughout this week, we are reflecting on the year just gone and looking forward to the new year ahead, using an ancient method of prayer known as the Examen.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Loving Father, please help me to be still. I open my ears to hear You now and I quietly prepare my heart for all that You have for me as I approach the new year.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's compassion today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 86...

Listen closely to my prayer, O LORD;

hear my urgent cry.

I will call to you whenever I'm in trouble,

and you will answer me.

Psalm 86:6-7 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today, I'm reflecting on a familiar passage from the book of Ecclesiastes...

There is a time for everything,

and a season for every activity under the heavens:

a time to be born and a time to die,

a time to plant and a time to uproot,

a time to kill and a time to heal,

a time to tear down and a time to build,

a time to weep and a time to laugh,

a time to mourn and a time to dance,

a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,

a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,

a time to search and a time to give up,

a time to keep and a time to throw away,

a time to tear and a time to mend,

a time to be silent and a time to speak,

*a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (NIV UK)*

There is a time for everything, including every emotion. There are times when I feel on top of the world, and other times when I feel as if I'm in a deep, dark valley.

The third stage of the Examen involves becoming aware of my emotions, and asking God to speak to me about, or even through, them.

Ask

And so, I take a few moments to think back over 2022. What activities, relationships or conversations carried the most emotion for me?

I listen carefully for anything that God wants to say to me about, or through, these feelings.

Pause and pray

As I reflect on the events that have taken place in my nation and around the world in 2022, what have I felt particularly sad or angry about?

Lord God, I intercede about this situation, and especially on behalf of those who continue to suffer. I ask You to intervene and make things right.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage I listen for a particular word or phrase that reflects something that I have felt or experienced over the last year...

*There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:
a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate,*

a time for war and a time for peace.
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (NIV UK)

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

Pause and pray

‘Prayer helps us stand in the presence of God with all we have and are,’ writes Henri Nouwen. ‘Our fears and anxieties; our guilt and shame; our sexual fantasies; our greed and anger; our joys, successes, aspirations, and hopes; our reflections, dreams and mental wandering... in short, all that makes us who we are. With all this we have to listen to God’s voice and allow God to speak to us in every corner of our being.’*

* Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction – Wisdom For The Long Walk Of Faith* (London: SPCK, 2011), pp. xvi-xvii.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Loving Father, I yield all that I am – all that I felt during the last year, and all that I am feeling right now as I prepare to enter the new year. Help me to love You, not just with all my mind, but with all my heart and all my soul too.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, I am particularly reassured that:

*The LORD is close to the broken-hearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*
Psalms 34:18 (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.

December 30 2022 (click for audio)

Encounter

Today is Friday the 30th of December. Throughout this week, we are reflecting on the year just gone and looking forward to the new year ahead, using an ancient method of prayer known as the Examen.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Loving Father, please help me to be still. I open my ears to hear You now and I quietly prepare my heart for all that You have for me as I approach the new year.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice that God is present with me, today and every day, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 23...

*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.
Even when I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid,
for you are close beside me.
Psalm 23:2-4a (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Shortly after His resurrection, Jesus cooked breakfast for some of His disciples on the shore of Lake Galilee. Today, I'm reflecting on the conversation that followed between Jesus and Peter which probably shaped the rest of Peter's life...

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?'
'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.'
Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'
Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'
He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.'
Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.'

The third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep.'

John 21:15-17 (NIV UK)

There's a symmetry between Peter denying Jesus three times beside the courtyard fire, and Jesus asking Peter, 'Do you love me?' three times beside the breakfast fire. It's as if Jesus recognized the power of that particular moment in Peter's recent experience, and so He applied His grace in a very specific way in order to heal and restore Peter.

The next stage of the Examen involves asking the Holy Spirit to bring an experience or encounter to mind and then using it as a focus for prayer.

Ask

Holy Spirit, as I think back over 2022, remind me of a particular experience or encounter.

I try to remember the details and the feelings as best I can, and I talk with God about them. I allow prayer to arise from within me.

Pause and pray

God, where have I fallen short of loving You and loving others this year? As examples come to mind, I confess them to You and say sorry.

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 they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?'

'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'

Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'

He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.'

The third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep.'

John 21:15-17 (NIV UK)

Over the last few days, I have remembered 2022, and I have recognized God's presence with me. I have given thanks and I have acknowledged the full range of emotions that I have experienced.

I imagine holding all of this in my hands as I sit beside Jesus on the shore of Lake Galilee. His question isn't, of course, 'Was 2022 a good year?' or 'Was 2022 a bad year?' or even 'How have you grown this year?' but simply this: 'Do you love me?' And it isn't a test. It's an invitation.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord Jesus, I love You. I yield myself to You and to Your grace. I don't deserve it. I make so many mistakes – I made plenty during 2022, as You well know. But I know that You love me, just as I am.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, I am grateful for the reassurance in the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome that:

...in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28 (NIV 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.

December 31 2022 (click for audio)

Looking Ahead

Today is Saturday the 31st of December, and it's the final day of 2022. So far this week, we have been reflecting on the year just gone, using an ancient method of prayer known as the Examen. Today we are looking ahead into 2023.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Loving Father, please help me to be still. I open my ears to hear You now and I quietly prepare my heart for all that You have for me as I approach the new year.

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 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 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Hebrews 11 is a roll-call of faith-full heroes in the Bible, and the following chapter begins with an invitation for me to join in with them...

*Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!
Hebrews 12:1-3 (MSG)*

Here, and elsewhere in the Bible (Isa. 43:18, Prov. 4:25, Phil. 3:12-14), I am encouraged not to dwell too much on the failures or the successes of what has gone before, but to fix my eyes on what is ahead, to where Jesus is leading and guiding me.

The final stage of the Examen involves looking forward with faith.

Ask

And so, as I look ahead into 2023, how do I feel about the new year? What am I hoping for? What am I excited about? What are my apprehensions and anxieties?

Lord God, I surrender all that I am feeling about 2023 to You, and I ask You to speak to me. Show me a particular verse or a story from the Bible, or maybe a picture, that You want me to carry into the new year.

Pause and pray

Turning my prayers outwards, I ask God to show me who He wants me to pray for today.

Lord God, I ask You to give me a verse or story from the Bible, or a picture, that You want to encourage this person with as they enter the new Year.

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 see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!
Hebrews 12:1-3 (MSG)

At the 1924 Olympics in Paris, the Scottish sprinter, Eric Liddell, refused to run the 100 meter heats because they were held on a Sunday. So he entered the 400 meters instead and won the gold medal. 'It has been a wonderful experience to compete in the Olympic Games and to bring home a gold medal,' he said. 'But since I have been a young lad, I have had my eyes on a different prize. You see, each one of us is in a greater race than any I have run in Paris, and this race ends when God gives out the medals.'* * Janet and Geoff Benge, *Eric Liddell: Something Greater than Gold*, (YWAM Publishing, 1999).

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Lord Jesus, I yield myself to You and Your plans for me in 2023. Help me to throw off anything that will hold me back, and to carry forward the good things that I have gained and the holy habits that I have learned in 2022. I fix my eyes on You, and I run the race that You have marked out for me in this new year.

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:

‘Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.’

Matthew 11:29-30 (MSG)

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.