

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, and members of the 24/7 Prayer Team.

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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

February 2023

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Audio for Each Day in MP3 Format

Month of February 2023

February 01 2023 (click for audio)

Jesus: Completion

Today is Wednesday the 1st of February. This week, at the start of a new year, we are fixing our eyes on Jesus by exploring what the Bible says about Jesus in the future.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, in this new season, I invite You to shape my life and set the direction of my year. I listen to Your word; I long to imitate Your works and I welcome Your Spirit as I fix my eyes on You.

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 33:

*For the word of the LORD holds true,
and we can trust everything he does.
He loves whatever is just and good;
the unfailing love of the LORD fills the earth.*
Psalm 33:4-5 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I'm reflecting on the work of Christ in His followers. In today's passage, Paul is expressing his joy and gratitude for the believers in Philippi as he looks ahead to their bright future with confidence and hope.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:3-6 (ESV UK)

The good work that Jesus began in the Philippians is the work of salvation and sanctification. He saves them from their sins and makes them holy. But this holiness is a journey which begins immediately and is completed on the day when Jesus returns. This is the 'now and not yet' aspect of holiness. I am at the same time totally forgiven and saved by grace, yet have the invitation to grow in holiness and Christlikeness every day.

Ask

How can I partner with Jesus to grow in holiness and Christlikeness today? John Wesley talks about 'having a single eye to the very best things, and a pure heart...'*

* John Wesley, Notes on the New Testament, Volume 3,5th Edition (Dublin: John Jones Printers, 1805), p. 6.

Thinking now about my eyes and all the things which clamor for their attention, I pause and pray:

Jesus, help me to direct my eyes to You today. To focus on all that is pure, lovely, and praiseworthy, that I may become more like You.

Pause and pray

I'm struck by the consistency of Paul's prayers for his friends and fellow believers as he talks about 'always' and 'every prayer' he prays for them.

I take a moment now to pray for a loved one. I picture their bright future, holy and blameless, and pray that God would help them today in their journey to Christlikeness.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:3-6 (ESVUK)

The word 'joy' appears in the book of Philippians sixteen times! More astonishing still is the fact that Paul was in prison whilst writing this letter. His absolute certainty about his future in Christ gave him unshakable joy in the present.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I thank You that my future is completely secure in You, both now and in the age to come. Thank You that I can taste joy today, whatever my circumstances, as I look ahead to the complete work of Christ. I yield once again to Your transforming power in my life.

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:

...now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

Romans 6:22 (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.

February 02 2023 (click for audio)

Jesus: First Fruits

Today is Thursday the 2nd of February. This week we're exploring what the Bible says about Jesus in the future.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, in this new season, I invite You to shape my life and set the direction of my year. I listen to Your word; I long to imitate Your works and I welcome Your Spirit as I fix my eyes on You.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*Songs of joy and victory are sung in the camp of the godly.
The strong right arm of the LORD has done glorious things!
The strong right arm of the LORD is raised in triumph.
The strong right arm of the LORD has done glorious things!
I will not die; instead, I will live
to tell what the LORD has done.*

Psalm 118:15-17 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I'm reflecting on Jesus' resurrection from the dead, and the impact of this for all those who follow Him.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

1 Corinthians 15:20-24 (ESV UK)

When Paul describes Jesus' resurrection from the dead as the 'first fruits', he is using terminology rich in significance for the Jewish people.

In the Old Testament the first fruits of every harvest were offered to God, symbolizing and consecrating the entire harvest to follow. In the same way, says Paul, Jesus' resurrection from the dead is a foretaste of our own resurrection.

Sadly I am certain of the painful reality of death because of my experience of this world. But I can also be certain of the joyful reality of resurrection because of my experience of Jesus.

Ask

The sting of death and suffering can feel overwhelming, but I take comfort today knowing that Jesus has not only experienced the grief and suffering I feel, He has also overcome it.

I take some time now to pray for the eyes of faith, to see in Jesus the first fruits: the beginning of the end of all the suffering around me.

Pause and pray

I think now of friends or loved ones who are currently living with the painful reality of death. I take time to pray for comfort and peace, asking that the sting of death would be relieved by the presence of Christ in their Midst.

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.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

1 Corinthians 15:20-24 (ESV UK)

In this passage Paul is reminding me once again of the end of the story. That this world, all pain and suffering, all powers and authorities, all sickness, disease, and death, all the things which seem so final and all-consuming right now, will one day be made new at the return of Christ.

As His follower, I know the end of the story, and so no matter how powerful these forces feel in my present, I can look to Christ and feel complete assurance about my future.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, I thank You that in You death is swallowed up in victory forever. I surrender my future once again to the glorious promise of resurrection and eternity with You. I look to You, the first fruits, and trust in the harvest yet to come.

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 Corinthians:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

“O death, where is your victory?

“O death, where is your sting?”

1 Corinthians 15:54b-55 (ESV 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.

February 03 2023 (click for audio)

Jesus: John's Vision

Today is Friday the 3rd of February. This week we're exploring what the Bible says about Jesus in the future.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, in this new season, I invite You to shape my life and set the direction of my year. I listen to Your word; I long to imitate Your works and I welcome Your Spirit as I fix my eyes on You.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*O LORD, our LORD, your majestic name fills the earth!
Your glory is higher than the heavens...
When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—
the moon and the stars you set in place—
what are mere mortals that you should think about them,
human beings that you should care for them?
Yet you made them only a little lower than God
and crowned them with glory and honor.*

Psalm 8:1,3-5 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I'm reflecting on John's vision in the book of Revelation. Revelation derives its name from the Greek word 'apokalypsis', which means 'unveiling'. It is the lifting of the curtain to reveal that which is normally unseen. The central figure being unveiled is Christ...

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lamp stands, and in the midst of the lamp stands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash round his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full

strength.

Revelation 1:12-16 (ESV UK)

The book of Revelation is full of confusing imagery and symbolism. On the surface it can appear daunting and difficult, yet its vision of the future Jesus is crucial for understanding who He is right now.

John offers multiple images to convey profound truths about the exalted person of Jesus. His hair is white like snow, which represents His purity. His eyes, like fire, display purifying power. His feet of bronze show His everlasting strength. His voice, like the roar of waters, speaks of His power and authority. In His hand he holds seven stars, which tells us He controls everything. The sword coming out of His mouth is an image of the word of God which pierces and separates. And His face is like the sun because light represents truth and goodness.*

* Darrell Johnson, *Discipleship on the Edge: An Expository Journey through the book of Revelation* (Vancouver, BC: Canadian Church Leaders Network, 2021), p. 5.

Ask

What aspect of this compelling image of Christ speaks most pertinently to my present situation?

I take a moment now to ask that I might encounter that aspect of Jesus in my day today.

Pause and pray

It can be difficult to see Christ clearly in the midst of challenging circumstances. I think now of someone I know who might be struggling to see Jesus today. I pray that Jesus would reveal Himself to them in a beautiful Way.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lamp stands, and in the midst of the lamp stands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash round his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

Revelation 1:12-16 (ESV UK)

John was so awestruck by this vision of the exalted Jesus that he immediately fell at His feet, as though dead.

It's hard to comprehend that this is the same Jesus with whom John walked and talked, and reclined against at the dinner table.

In the incarnation of Jesus, I see a God who became completely, genuinely human. And in Revelation, I see Him raised up to the highest place, and given the name that is above every name, that at His name every knee will bow.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, like John, I find myself in awe of You. May my life reflect the glory of the risen Christ as I yield once again to Your will. I thank You today for Your purity, Your power, Your everlasting strength, Your authority, Your governance, Your word, Your truth, and Your goodness.

Yielding Promise

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

'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Revelation 1:17b-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.

February 04 2023 (click for audio)

Jesus: I Am Coming Soon

Today is Saturday the 4th of February. This is the last day this week that we're exploring what the Bible says about Jesus in the future.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, in this new season, I invite You to shape my life and set the direction of my year. I listen to Your word; I long to imitate Your works and I welcome Your Spirit as I fix my eyes on You.

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 Psalm 116:

*I will lift up the cup of salvation
and praise the LORD's name for saving me...
I will offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the LORD.
Psalm 116:13,17 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Today I'm reflecting on the final chapter of the Bible. Having offered numerous visions of the age to come, John ends his revelation with a promise from Jesus about His return...

*The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.
I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.
He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!
Revelation 22:17-20 (ESV UK)*

In Scripture, Jesus' final words to His church are a promise of His imminent return. It can be easy, in the midst of the busyness, the highs and lows of daily life, to forget that this world is not permanent, and that this reality is not the eternal one.

In this passage, I am invited to play my part in ushering in the coming reality, joining in with the work of the Spirit, and beckoning in our bright future, saying 'Come, Lord Jesus!'

Ask

Eugene Peterson said: 'I read the Revelation not to get new information but to revive my imagination.*'

* Eugene Peterson, Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. xi-xii.

Unlocking my imagination now, I picture the return of Jesus and the age to come. What will it feel like to stand in His presence at last?

Pause and pray

I think now about those who don't yet know Jesus and ask for specific opportunities to share the hope that I have with them.

I pray that the Holy Spirit would awaken a thirst in those around me for the presence of Jesus and the water of life He holds.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!
Revelation 22:17-20 (ESV UK)

The book of Revelation not only contains hope for the future, but also abundant promises in the present. There is an open invitation today for anyone who is thirsty to come and drink.

The question is simply this: Am I thirsty? Do I desire His presence today?

I join with the Holy Spirit now and pray, 'Come, Lord Jesus'.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I am so grateful that I can receive the water of life without price. Recognizing that You paid that price for me, I repent once again of my sin and receive Your gift of forgiveness.

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:

'If you drink the water I give you, you will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give you will become in you a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

Adapted from John 4:14 (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.

February 05 2023 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Jesus Prayer

It's Sunday the 5th of February. This week we've meditating on Jesus in the future. Today, on this Sabbath day of rest, we take a break from our usual P.R.A.Y. patterns to pray a little differently.

Author Wayne Muller reminds me that,

'Sabbath time is set apart for remembering the holiness of life. If we speed up and saturate ourselves with accomplishment and worry, we may defile what is sacred with our mindlessness. Time is the key. Time, and attention.*

* Wayne Muller, Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in our Busy Lives, (New York: Bantam, 2000), p. 196.

And so, I begin by welcoming the Spirit, and giving Jesus my full attention.

Pause and pray

In Mark's Gospel I read about a man who caught Jesus' attention...

As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus ... was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.' So they called to the blind man, 'Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you.' Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus asked him.

Mark 10:46-51 (NIV UK)

I imagine myself as Bartimaeus waiting in a crowded street. I spot Jesus through the throng and, desperate for His attention, I repeat over and over again:

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.

Pause and pray

I see Jesus turn, He's looking for me! Our eyes meet, the noise of the street fades into the background. I'm no longer aware of the crowds, I'm only aware of Jesus. Time stops, He has my full attention. He calls me to join Him and as I approach, He asks, 'What do you want me to do for you?' I share with Jesus the thing I most desperately want and pray...

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.

Pause and pray

Father, open my eyes to the people in my community who go unseen and unheard by all but You. Show me who You notice; I want to give them my attention today.

Jesus, teach the Church to pray with the passion and persistence of Bartimaeus. We tire easily. Help us not to give up but to cry out again and again and again for Your intervention in our world.

Holy Spirit, as the Church gathers across the globe today, help us fix 'our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith' (Heb. 12:2, NIVUK). Interrupt our plans, our preaches and our programs; we give You our full attention.

And now I root these big prayers in my community by naming someone I know who doesn't yet know Jesus. Father, draw them to Your Son.

Pause and pray

Sabbath Blessing

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

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

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

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

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

Amen.

** Pete Greig, Sabbath Blessing, petegreig.info

February 06 2023 (click for audio)

Hearts Set on Pilgrimage

It's Monday the 6th of February, and today we're beginning an extraordinary journey into one of the most important and challenging themes in Scripture. Pilgrimage has been the primary predisposition of God's people from the patriarch Abraham, wandering in the wilderness, to the Apostle Peter, urging persecuted Christians in Asia Minor to live 'as aliens and strangers in this world' (1 Peter 2:11, AMP). 'Faith is not the clinging to a shrine,' says the Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, 'but an endless pilgrimage of the heart.'

And so today we begin a very special three-week 'pilgrimage of the heart', focusing on our heavenly home.

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, I recognize a relentless restlessness within my soul, calling me onwards, upwards, and inwards to Yourself. And so I set my heart upon pilgrimage and my feet on the road, my hopes upon heaven and my eyes upon You.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

*The teaching of your word gives light,
so even the simple can understand.
I pant with expectation,
longing for your commands.
Come and show me your mercy,
as you do for all who love your name.
Psalm 119:130-132 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the way that the Psalmist spoke of deep longing and hunger for God in his daily journey:

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,*

*at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.
Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise!
Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.*
Psalm 84:1-5 (ESV UK)

I love the paradox within this Psalm; the writer celebrates God's house as his home here and now, whilst also feeling homesick for something, somewhere, or someone more. This is surely the reality of pilgrimage: our hearts have somehow become 'the highways to Zion' (v.5). We know God's presence with us on our journey through life, and yet we are homesick for heaven. For me, this sense of longing is very literal. I have spent the last eight years living in Cornwall, England, but sometimes long for the sunshine and familiarity of California, where I grew up. I miss the sunshine but recognize that my true home is found in the presence of God. Any place of sacrifice in my pilgrimage has only been an invitation to presence. I consider a place of pain in my story, and the way that God's presence has met me in that pain.

Ask

In what ways am I too settled in this life? I wonder today about the comforts and false attachments that can keep me from taking risks. Are there any ways in which God might be inviting me to move?

Spirit of God, speak to me about any place of comfort that might be rooting me wrongly in this life, numbing my longing for heaven, robbing me of the joy of Your presence.

Pause and pray

I pray today for my companions on the pilgrimage and journey of life.

Holy Spirit, will You show me how to be a wise, honest, and generous friend? I think particularly of a friend who is longing for home or feeling unsettled. Show me how to be intentionally kind to someone who is lonely 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.

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.*

*Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise!
Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
Psalm 84:1-5 (ESV UK)*

It's easy to forget joy in my daily journey. The Psalmist reminds me here to find the sustaining loveliness of God's presence to carry me through everyday aches and wounds. Over the years, walking in pilgrimage has increased my strength physically, but today I pray for a greater strength of heart and soul sustained by the presence of Jesus.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

*Jesus, I give You the unnecessary burdens,
the weights and worries that I so easily collect,
the challenges that weigh me down as I walk towards You.
I thank You for the light and easy burden
of fullness of joy 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 Matthew:

"Come to me, you who are weary carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."
Adapted and personalized from Matthew 11:28-30 (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.

February 07 2023 (click for audio)

Pilgrimage and Thanksgiving

Today is Tuesday the 7th of February, and this week we are exploring the ancient pilgrimage of the people of God, using the lens of thanksgiving and anticipation. 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, I recognize a relentless restlessness within my soul, calling me onwards, upwards, and inwards to Yourself. And so I set my heart upon pilgrimage and my feet on the road, my hopes upon heaven and my eyes upon You.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God’s wide-open welcome to me on my journey, joining with the ancient praise of all God’s people in the words of Psalm 118...

*Open for me the gates where the righteous enter,
and I will go in and thank the LORD.
These gates lead to the presence of the LORD,
and the godly enter there.
Psalm 118:19-20 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the way that the Psalmist anticipated arriving at his destination after his time of pilgrimage, the way he longed for great gladness in the presence of God:

*I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!”
Our feet have been standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem!
Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together,
to which the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.
Psalm 122:1-4 (ESV UK)*

Since I was a small child, I have rejoiced in attending church on Sundays, sitting in the house of the Lord with the people of God. As I have grown in my years and my understanding of pilgrimage, my longing has extended beyond Sunday services to knowing the presence of God with me every day.

Ask

Have I stopped going to church?

Jesus, I pray that You would reawaken my delight to pilgrimage to the house of the Lord. Heal any places of doubt or mistrust, any wounds of relationship, any differences I hold with the people of God. Bind my heart firmly together with the hearts of other followers of Jesus.

Pause and pray

I pray today for my brothers and sisters within Christian community. I grieve the places where division, gossip, pain, or anger have wounded our unity. I pray particularly for a place where I know relationships are broken. Spirit of God, will You bring reconciliation and the peace of Your presence to wounded and hurting Places?

Pause and pray

Yield

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

*I was glad when they said to me,
 "Let us go to the house of the LORD!"
Our feet have been standing
 within your gates, O Jerusalem!
Jerusalem—built as a city
 that is bound firmly together,
to which the tribes go up,
 the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,
 to give thanks to the name of the LORD.*

Psalm 122:1-4 (ESV UK)

The Psalmist's sheer gladness of arrival overwhelms me. In speaking of the pilgrim's arrival, Tom Wright says:

*'We go on the pilgrim way, we follow the way of the Lord, because he himself is the way - and as he said himself, the truth and the life as well. We go to meet him afresh, to share his agony, and to pray and work for the victory he won on the cross to be implemented, and for his way to be followed, in ... our own countries, and in the whole world.'**

* Tom Wright, *The Way of the Lord: Christian Pilgrimage Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) pp. 9-11, 130.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

*Father, I thank You for the gift of gladness,
for the way You love me in the beginning, middle, and end of my journey.
I pray today for an unhurried, lingering sense of Your presence,
and for a restoration of joy in my pilgrimage with God's people.*

Yielding Promise

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

"For the LORD your God is living among you. I am your mighty savior. I will take delight in you with gladness. With my love, I will calm all your fears. I will rejoice over you with joyful songs."
Zephaniah 3:17 (NLT), adapted into 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.

February 08 2023 (click for audio)

Pilgrimage and Learning

Today is Wednesday the 8th of February, and this week we are exploring pilgrimage that leads to learning and new vision in the light of God's presence.

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, I recognize a relentless restlessness within my soul, calling me onwards, upwards, and inwards to Yourself. And so I set my heart upon pilgrimage and my feet on the road, my hopes upon heaven and my eyes upon You.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's smiling peace with me on my journey today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 4...

*Many people say, "Who will show us better times?"
Let your face smile on us, LORD.
You have given me greater joy
than those who have abundant harvests of grain and new wine.
In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for you alone, O LORD, will keep me safe.
Psalm 4:6-8 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the way that pilgrimage invites me to learn a new way of living, reshaping my life and my world in light of the presence of God:

*and many peoples shall come, and say:
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go the law,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.
O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk*

*in the light of the LORD.
Isaiah 2:3-5 (ESV UK)*

'A pilgrimage is a journey undertaken in the light of a story. A great event has happened; the pilgrim hears the reports and goes in search of evidence, aspiring to be an eyewitness. The pilgrim seeks not only to confirm the experience of others firsthand but to be changed by the experience.'* I see in this passage that the prophet knows that a pilgrimage to the house of the Lord will teach him a new way of living, showing him how to carry peace to a world torn by war.

* Paul Elie, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003), p. x.

Ask

*Holy Spirit, show me if I am too settled in this world. Shift me from the anchoring places of my own security. Remind me that 'You have made me for yourself, O Lord, and my heart is restless until it rests in you.'***

** St. Augustine's *Confessions* (Lib 1,1-2,2.5,5: CSEL 33, 1-5).

Pause and pray

I pray for places of restlessness and conflict within my world. I particularly hold up today a place of violence and war-torn pain. I pray that Christ, the eternal King, would bring the peace that beats swords into plowshares, and show individuals and leaders how to sow the seeds of peace

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 many peoples shall come, and say:
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go the law,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.
O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD.
Isaiah 2:3-5 (ESV UK)*

The prophet anticipates a time when many will say, 'come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.' The ancient art of pilgrimage was never in isolation; the community of God was walking together towards the brightness of the presence of God, a new way of living, and a whole new identity.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, I am not content with slight improvements; I want Your new and unexpected life. Open my eyes and heart to learn to walk Your way today. Make every place of uphill challenge a pathway to 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 Revelation:

"I will wipe away every tear from your eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things will pass away." And Jesus, seated on the throne reminds me, "Behold, I am making all things new." And where I doubt, he reminds me, "...these words are trustworthy and true."

Revelation 21:4-5 (ESV UK), adapted into 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.

February 09 2023 (click for audio)

Pilgrimage and Tradition

Today is Thursday the 9th of February, and today I am considering ancient, annual rhythms of pilgrimage.

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, I recognize a relentless restlessness within my soul, calling me onwards, upwards, and inwards to Yourself. And so I set my heart upon pilgrimage and my feet on the road, my hopes upon heaven and my eyes upon You.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's eternal victory on my journey, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 24...

Open up, ancient gates!

Open up, ancient doors,

and let the King of glory enter.

Who is the King of glory?

The Lord of Heaven's Armies—

He is the King of glory.

Psalm 24:9-10 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the tradition of pilgrimage and its connection to feasts throughout the story of the people of God:

"Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor."

Exodus 23:14-16 (ESV UK)

Ancient pilgrimage was tied to three biblical feasts: the Feast of Unleavened Bread, anticipating the sacrificial coming of Christ at Passover; the Feast of Harvest, anticipating the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost; and the Feast of Ingathering, anticipating the tabernacling presence of God with us. How are these feasts and ideas relevant to my life today?

Ask

Father, I ask for a fresh revelation of Your sacrificial coming, the anointing of Your Spirit, and Your daily companionship. Today, I feast on your presence.

Pause and pray

I hold before You a sage, one who holds aged wisdom and the tenderness of many years spent in Your presence. I pray that You would be with them in the physical challenges of age, and make their final years full of the presence of Your Spirit.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

"Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor."

Exodus 23:14-16 (ESV UK)

The community of ancient faith had recurring rhythms in their annual calendars. I think about the regular rhythms of my life. How can I create consistent patterns of pursuing the presence of God?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Holy Spirit, I thank You that in Your presence 'all the way to heaven is heaven'. Establish my heart and my life to pursue You with consistency in my daily pilgrimage.*

* Catherine of Siena, quoted in Dorothy Day, *Selected Writings*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), p. 179.

Yielding Promise

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

*"because of the tender mercy of my God,
the sunrise shall visit me from on high
to give light where I sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide my feet into the way of peace."*

Luke 1:78-79 (ESV UK), personalized

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.

February 10 2023 (click for audio)

Pilgrimage and Eternity

Today is Friday the 10th of February, and this week we are exploring the eternal reality of walking in pilgrimage with the God who created us.

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, I recognize a relentless restlessness within my soul, calling me onwards, upwards, and inwards to Yourself. And so I set my heart upon pilgrimage and my feet on the road, my hopes upon heaven and my eyes upon You.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's eternal wisdom on my journey today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 48...

For that is what God is like.

*He is our God forever and ever,
and he will guide us until we die.*

Psalm 48:14 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the questions God asked Job during his pilgrimage of intense suffering:

*"Have you entered into the springs of the sea,
or walked in the recesses of the deep?
Have the gates of death been revealed to you,
or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?
Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?
Declare, if you know all this.
"Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
and where is the place of darkness,
that you may take it to its territory
and that you may discern the paths to its home?"*

Job 38:16-20 (ESV UK)

In my places of pilgrimage, I often encounter God in mystery. I am always searching for settled answers but, over and over, my times of walking with God have reminded me that He is with me - in the deep darkness, in my search for light, in the wide expanse, as I walk home. I am often looking for an immediate rescue from my painful circumstances, and yet it is often these pains that are expanding my heart to search and find the presence of the God who is my closest companion and eternal Saviour.

Ask

The author Glen Scrivener reminds me that Jesus is 'love come down, to be my brother, to be with me in the darkness, to take my death, to plunge it into hell, and then to offer me life and light through his resurrection.*

* Glen Scrivener, *What Christians Believe*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOjTFQd8hI4>.

Jesus, I pray that I would know Your eternal kindness in the painful places of my life. I ask for a new revelation of Your presence in even my darkest places.

Pause and pray

I pray now for a friend or family member who is sitting in darkness.

Holy Spirit, will You draw near to them now as light in their darkness. Widen the expanse of their hearts to see and recognize the eternal presence of God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, so they might find their true home in 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.

*"Have you entered into the springs of the sea,
or walked in the recesses of the deep?
Have the gates of death been revealed to you,
or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?
Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?
Declare, if you know all this.
"Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
and where is the place of darkness,
that you may take it to its territory
and that you may discern the paths to its home?"*

Job 38:16-20 (ESV UK)

As I walk in pilgrimage, I often pray a simple prayer of intimacy. I choose a name of God that reveals His life to me and use it to pray for a particular revelation of the presence of God. This past summer, as I walked the Camino de Santiago, I prayed over and over:

Holy Spirit, make room.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

So today, I pray this simple prayer:

Holy Spirit, make room.

Declutter my mind, show me the pathways of light, and remind me of the nearness of Your presence today. Thank You that You are the God who is with me as companion, Saviour, and guide.

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 Psalms:

*I have rescued you from death;
I have kept your feet from slipping
So now you can walk in my presence,
In my life-giving light.
Psalm 56:13 (NLT), adapted and personalized*

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.

February 11 2023 (click for audio)

The Order of the Mustard Seed

It's Saturday the 11th of February, and today we are pausing our pilgrimage of the heart series to celebrate a very special anniversary for users of Lectio 365. On this day in 2005, the Order of the Mustard Seed (OMS) was re-launched at Holy Trinity Church on Clapham Common in London. And if you've ever wondered where the six practices at the heart of Lectio 365 come from (prayer and creativity, justice and hospitality, learning and mission), they are directly derived from the OMS Rule of Life.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Lord, as I become aware of Your presence now, I offer You my tiny, unimpressive mustard seed of faith, asking You to germinate and cultivate it into something fruitful which cannot be shaken. Amen.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in the joy of belonging, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in words of Isaiah the prophet:

*"I will bring them to my holy mountain of Jerusalem
and will fill them with joy in my house of prayer.
I will accept their burnt offerings and sacrifices,
because my Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations.
For the Sovereign LORD,
who brings back the outcasts of Israel, says:
I will bring others, too,
besides my people Israel.'*
Isaiah 56:7-8 (NLT)

It was on this day, 18 years ago, that Pete Greig gathered a group of a hundred friends at Holy Trinity, Clapham, the church in which William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect once prayed for the abolition of slavery and the transformation of the morals of the nation.

The 24-7 Prayer movement was five years old and many of its leaders, gathered in the church that night, had been trying to make sense of what God was doing in and through their lives. The surprising discovery they'd made was that Count Zinzendorf, the 18th century German aristocrat who led the Moravian hundred-year prayer meeting and inspired the modern day 24-7 movement, had also founded a Religious Order, named after one of Jesus' favorite metaphors:

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

Matthew 13:31-32 (ESV UK)

It was at the University of Wittenberg in the spring of 1716 that Zinzendorf and his friends first vowed to be true to Christ, to be kind to people, and to play their part in taking the gospel to the nations. Banding together around these three biblical priorities, galvanized by the simple power of promising, they called themselves The Order of the Mustard Seed.

The group that gathered to renew the OMS on this day in 2005 solemnly stood to make Zinzendorf's promises their own. Their tiny mustard seeds of faith started to multiply, growing into many nations, into resources like Lectio 365, and into a family of monasteries, such as Waverley Abbey, which has become a mother house for the worldwide order.

Day by day, OMS members live out their three vows very practically through the six practices at the heart of Lectio 365. Thus the promise to be true to Christ is lived out through the practices of prayer and creativity. The promise to be kind is lived out through the practices of hospitality and justice. And the promise to be missional is lived out through the practices of evangelism and learning.

As someone currently enrolled in the year-long discernment process for joining the Order of the Mustard Seed, I see the genuine joy and life these simple promises and practices can bring to those who live them out in covenant community.

Ask

Promises can feel large and scary. Long-term commitment is increasingly counter-cultural. And yet, covenants lie at the heart of Christian faith. 'Come now,' says Laban to his son-in-law Jacob, 'Let's make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us' (Genesis 31:44).

Have I been hurt by broken promises? Am I afraid of making commitments? What promises have I made in my life? I take time now to review or renew them before God.

Pause and pray

The three vows of the Order of the Mustard Seed address Christ's two Great Commandments (to love God and love my neighbor) and his one Great Commission (to go into all the world and make disciples of every nation).

Jesus, where are You calling me into the world today? Who are You calling me to be kind to today? How can I take Your gospel to my community 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:

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

Matthew 13:31-32 (ESV UK)

This image of birds nesting in the branches of a tree was a familiar biblical metaphor for nations drawn to the Lord, finding a place to roost in His presence. The mustard seed sown by Zinzendorf in his student days would certainly become such a tree. He and the Moravians became the first to take the

gospel to many nations. 'I have but one passion,' said Zinzendorf. 'It is [Christ] alone. The world is the field and the field is the world; and henceforth that country shall be my home where I can be most used in winning souls for Christ.*

*Count Zinzendorf, cited in Simon Guillebaud, *More than Conquerors, A Call to Radical Discipleship* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2011), p. 169.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I confess that I often don't live up to Jesus' example. I frequently fail to be kind. I don't take every opportunity to share Your good news with others. Today I yield to You alone and re-center myself on Your call to be faithful, kind, and to take Your gospel into the world.

Yielding promise

Today I am thankful that You, Lord, are a covenant-keeping God who promises that:

*'I will give you a memorial and a name ...
I will fill you with joy in my house of prayer.'*
adapted from *Isaiah 56:5,7 (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.

February 12 2023 (click for audio)

Ancient Pilgrimage: Sabbath Prayer

Today is Sunday the 12th of February, a day of celebration. On this Sabbath day of rest, we interrupt our usual daily pattern with a shorter, simpler time of prayer.

The author John Henry Newman writes:

Christ is already in that place of peace, which is all in all. He is on the right hand of God. He is hidden in the brightness of the radiance which issues from the everlasting throne. He is in the very abyss of peace, where there is no voice of tumult or distress, but a deep stillness... He has entered into His rest. That is our home; here we are on a pilgrimage, and Christ calls us to His many mansions which He has prepared.*

* <https://www.newmanreader.org/works/parochial/volume6/sermon16.html>

Pause and pray

Jesus speaks to His followers about eternal rest in the presence of God in one of his last conversations with them before He goes to the cross. We find these words in John, chapter 14:

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 14:1-6, (ESV UK)

Pause and pray

As I receive the promise of an eternal home and a place prepared for me, I ask for a deep sense of the presence of God. I rest in knowing that God's promises to me are faithful and true. I imagine sitting and laughing in the presence of God, fully at home.

With renewed confidence in God's promises to me, I come to him in prayer for His Church as it opens its doors to the world:

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

Jesus, we pray for those who are lonely or on the margins today, and especially for those who are attending church for the first time or the last time. May they find themselves noticed and loved.

And for those who are nowhere near a church meeting today, send us out to bring the prodigals home.

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

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

Pause and pray

And now I dedicate the coming week to the Lord, accepting His invitation and offering Him my heart and my home in return:

Thank You, Father, for welcoming me home into Your heart.

Love me this week as I welcome You home into my heart.

Thank You, Jesus, for standing and knocking at the door of my life.

Befriend me again this week as I open the shameful and vulnerable parts of myself to You.

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for brooding over the chaos of my world and within my inner being,

Fill me this week as I seek to host You with generous attention and joy.

Sabbath blessing

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

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

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

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

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

** Pete Greig, Sabbath Blessing, petegreig.info

February 13 2023 (click for audio)

The Journey of Life

Today is Monday the 13th of February and our theme this week is 'pilgrimage' which is, according to the BBC, 'the largest collective human activity on earth – and growing'.*

* The Why Factor, BBC Radio 4, Friday 28 August 2015.

Having focused last week on pilgrimage in the Old Testament, this week we're jumping into the New Testament, focusing our prayers on the power and purpose of pilgrimage in the life of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Pause

And so, 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, I recognize a relentless restlessness within my soul, calling me onwards, upwards, and inwards to Yourself. And so I set my heart upon pilgrimage today: my feet on the road, and my eyes upon You.

Rejoice and Reflect

I rejoice in the blessings of God today, taking hold of the ancient benediction of Psalm 84 and making it my own:

*Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.
As they pass through the Valley of Baka,
they make it a place of springs;
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.
They go from strength to strength,
till each appears before God in Zion.*

Psalm 84:5-7 (NIV UK)

Pause and pray

Today I begin my exploration of pilgrimage in the life of Jesus with one of the most surprising and dramatic moments from his childhood...

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to

Jerusalem, searching for him.

Luke 2:41-45 (ESV UK)

There are no fewer than three pilgrimages hidden in this passage. First, there's the most obvious one: the three-day journey undertaken annually by Jesus' entire family to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. Clearly, pilgrimage was integral to Jesus' childhood, marking many of His earliest memories and shaping His view of the world. Secondly, there's the Passover itself: that night in Egypt when the Israelites first became a pilgrim people. Thirdly, there's the journey of Mary and Joseph back to Jerusalem 'searching for him' (v.45). It's hard to think of a better definition of Christian pilgrimage than this: a costly journey to a significant location searching for Jesus.

Ask

Mary and Joseph loved Jesus, yet they lost Him. They knew Him but didn't always understand Him. This sounds familiar! Like them, I love Jesus, but sometimes lose His presence. I know Jesus, but don't always understand His ways. As honestly as I can, therefore, I admit my questions to Him now, my struggles with faith, the ways in which 'I still haven't found what I'm looking for.'**

** 'Somewhere at the heart of "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" is John Bunyan's idea of Pilgrim's Progress.' (Bono, describing one of his best-known songs in *Surrender*, Penguin Random House, 2022, p. 507.)

Pause and pray

I'm struck by the enormous effort and expense invested by Jesus' family in their annual pilgrimage, and the significance of such journeys in the life of all God's people. Thinking of an upcoming Christian conference or festival, I pray for an outpouring of the Spirit upon all who make the effort to attend.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I try to imagine the range of expressions passing across Mary's face as these extraordinary events unfold...

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.

Luke 2:41-45 (ESV UK)

Pause and pray

We're told that Mary and Joseph lost Jesus by 'supposing him to be in the group' (v.44). This is precisely how I tend to lose Jesus too: by 'supposing him to be in the group'. Like Mary and Joseph,

lost in conversation with their friends and family, all too easily I lose the presence of Jesus in the crowd. Trusting my fellow travelers to look to Jesus, I fail to trust and look to Him myself. By ‘supposing him to be in the group’, my faith becomes vicarious, my relationship religious, and I find myself more absorbed in the distractions of Christian community than in Jesus Christ Himself.

Yielding Prayer

I set my feet on the pilgrim's way for the coming day. Acknowledging its ordinariness, I choose to seek Your face in the people I meet. Accepting its pace, I choose to welcome frustrations as invitations to grace. And anticipating its temptations, I fix my eyes on You who beckons me home.

Yielding Promise

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

‘Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is I, the LORD your God who goes with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.’

(Adapted from Deuteronomy 31:6, ESV 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.

February 14 2023 (click for audio)

Valentine's Day

Today is Tuesday the 14th of February: Valentine's Day. And so we pause our usual pattern of prayers to celebrate the saint who gave this day its name.

Pause

But first, 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 Lord Jesus, on this day when the world goes a little crazy celebrating romance, I'm grateful for the sanity and sacrifice of Your faithful friend Valentine, who laid down his life for the greatest love of all.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in the power of love that holds the world together, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of the apostle Paul:

I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39 (NLT)

Pause and pray

It was on this day in the year 269 that a priest named Valentine was martyred in Rome for audaciously preaching the gospel to the Emperor Claudius, and secretly marrying persecuted Christians. Legend has it that he cut hearts from parchment to remind those he married of God's love. Another story describes Valentine healing the blindness of his jailer's daughter, and sending her a note from prison signed simply, 'Your Valentine'.* It is ironic and significant that this great archetype of romantic love was himself both single and celibate.

*Frank Staff, *The Valentine & Its Origins*(Frederick A. Praeger, 1969).

Ask

As a teenager I dreaded Valentine's Day because I never received a card. When I got married, I learned the importance of investing in romance. And then as a pastor I discovered how painful Valentine's Day can be for many people. So here's a prayer I wrote for those who will find today tough:**

**Pete Greig, *A Valentine Prayer* © www.petegreig.info

I pray today for those in love, those out of love, and those in between. I remember especially those who find themselves a little bit lonelier than normal.

Lord, I do not pray today for loved-up couples, exchanging overpriced flowers and foil-wrapped hearts, leaking pheromones like diesel fumes at candlelit dinners. I'm pretty sure they will be OK (for now).

Instead, I hereby dedicate this happy-crappy day to anyone caring for a loved-one with a chronic illness of body, mind or soul. Lord let them be a little bit more okay because I prayed.

Flame of Love, melt our tiny, tinny chocolate hearts. Wherever marriages have grown cold, calloused with conflict, or mired in the mundane, would you please rekindle the fires of true romance?

Attend to the elderly gentleman gazing at a fading sepia photograph in a silver frame of a wedding in another time. Look at him and look with him and be with him in the remembering and the unremembering too.

And, on this day named after one of your unmarried saints, would You please bring a little unexpected joy to every wistful soul buying flowers for themselves? May their daffodils last longer and shine brighter than the overpriced red roses that also caught their eye.

God of all comfort, strengthen single parents on this difficult day. Let their kids be kind, let their teens tidy their bedrooms, and if that's a miracle too far (I realize You've got a lot on in the world right now), could they at least be less grumpy and initiate a hug at bedtime?

And so, may the arms of love, flung wide on the cross, embrace the unlovely and unloving parts of my world, my workplace, and my life today. Forgive me, I pray, for this cheap, hysterical, isolating thing I have sometimes made of love, of life, and of you.

Amen

Yield

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me 'with an everlasting love' (Jer. 31:3) speaks tenderly into the very depths of my soul, saying:

*Arise, my love, my beautiful one,
and come away,
for behold, the winter is past;
the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth,
the time of singing has come.*

Song of Solomon 2:10-12a (ESV 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.

February 15 2023 (click for audio)

Call of the Wild

Today is Wednesday the 15th of February and this week we're exploring the power and purpose of pilgrimage in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, seeking to follow more faithfully in His footsteps, day by day. As usual our prayers will be shaped by the acronym P.R.A.Y. – 'P': pausing to be still; 'R': rejoicing with a Psalm; 'A': asking God to help us and other people too, 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, I recognize a relentless restlessness within my soul, calling me onwards, upwards, and inwards to Yourself. And so I set my heart upon pilgrimage today: my feet on the road, and my eyes upon You.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in God's protection and provision, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 125:

A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

Those who trust in the LORD are as secure as Mount Zion;

they will not be defeated but will endure forever.

Just as the mountains surround Jerusalem,

so the LORD surrounds his people, both now and forever.

Psalm 125:1-2 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the dramatic moment when Jesus calls His first disciples...

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Matthew 4:18-22 (ESV UK)

Four fishermen quietly plying their trade. But then Jesus turns up: 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men'. With these ten words he catapults these brothers from the shores of Galilee to the ends of the earth, from anonymity into unimaginable influence, from predictable stability into lives of

perpetual pilgrimage. The call to follow Christ has not changed. He remains The Great Disrupter, challenging me to trade what I know for the great unknown, and all that I own for a greater cause.

Ask

How do I feel about this idea of Jesus as The Great Disrupter? In what ways has my life become too predictable and safe?

Pause and pray

Thinking of someone known to me who has answered Christ's call to serve cross-culturally as a missionary, I ask the Holy Spirit to give me a word of encouragement to send them this week.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage I notice its pace, its exuberance, the joyous spontaneity pulsing through these encounters...

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Matthew 4:18-22 (ESV UK)

'Immediately [Simon and Andrew] left their nets'. 'Immediately [James and John] left the boat and [even] their father and followed him'. Heart-led spontaneity can be a mark of the Spirit: 'The wind blows wherever it pleases,' says Jesus. 'You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit' (John 3:8). There is a wildness about 'the life of the pilgrim,' says Brennan Manning, 'who leaves what is nailed down, obvious, and secure, and walks into the unknown without any rational explanation to justify the decision or guarantee the future. Why? Because God has signaled the movement and offered it his presence and his promise.'*

* Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002).

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

*Disturb me, Lord, when I am too well pleased with myself,
When my dreams have come true
Because I have dreamed too little,
When I arrived safely
Because I sailed too close to the shore.
Disturb me, Lord, to dare more boldly,*

*To venture on wider seas
Where storms will show your mastery;
Where losing sight of land, I shall find the stars.
Amen ***

** Variously attributed to Sir Francis Drake, Desmond Tutu and others, this prayer, which I have personalized here, was first published by M. K. W. Heicher in The Minister's Manual, vol. 37 (1962) under the title 'Stir us, Oh Lord'.

Yielding Promise

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

'No one who has sacrificed [anything] will lose out. It will all come back multiplied many times over in your lifetime. And then the bonus of eternal life!'

(Adapted from Luke 18:29-30, 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.

February 16 2023 (click for audio)

Endless Pilgrimage of the Heart

It's Thursday the 16th of February, and today we continue to focus our prayers on the power and purpose of pilgrimage in the life of Jesus. Rabbi Abraham Heschel says of faith that it 'is not the clinging to a shrine, but an endless pilgrimage of the heart.* And so today I resume that 'endless pilgrimage of the heart', renewing my commitment to walk faithfully in the footsteps of Jesus.

* Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* (Stuttgart: MacMillan, 1976), p. 174.

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, I recognize a relentless restlessness within my soul, calling me onwards, upwards, and inwards to Yourself. And so I set my heart upon pilgrimage today: my feet on the road, and my eyes upon You.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in the loving attentiveness of God today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 121...

*A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.
I look up to the mountains—
 does my help come from there?
My help comes from the LORD,
 who made heaven and earth!
He will not let you stumble;
 the one who watches over you will not slumber.
Indeed, he who watches over Israel
 never slumbers or sleeps.*
Psalm 121:1-4 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I join Jesus on a dusty road through Samaria. It's high noon and He's resting from the extreme heat at Jacob's well...

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)...

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”
John 4:7-9, 16-18 (ESV UK)

Jews in Jesus' time despised Samaria and ostracized Samaritans. They would walk six days instead of three just to bypass this region. So Jesus is transgressing geographical, cultural, and spiritual divides by choosing this route, by conversing with this woman, and by delving so deeply into her private life. Christians are pilgrims in this world because Christ was first a pilgrim, moving relentlessly from heaven to earth, Jew to Gentile, man to woman, Gethsemane to Golgotha, Jerusalem to Judea to the ends of the earth. My journey towards Jesus mirrors His towards me. I leave home to find home.

Ask

Jesus establishes a powerful connection with this woman simply, initially, by making Himself vulnerable, asking for her help. How might I make myself vulnerable today? Is there someone I might help by asking for their help?

Pause and pray

Thinking of someone whose relationships are a mess, I ask You, Lord, to prioritize them, just as You did with the woman at the well, comforting and commissioning them into Your new Plan A for their life.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the story, instead of re-reading the verses in our usual way, I pick it up as the disciples return from their shopping trip to find Jesus locked in deep conversation with a dubious stranger:

Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” They went out of the town and were coming to him.

John 4: 27-29 (ESV UK)

Jesus' model of ministry here is 'transformation through acceptance.'** He transforms her life - awkwardly at first - by naming her shame (it isn't her sin but herself which He accepts), and secondly by loving her regardless. Elsewhere, Jesus touches the unclean, defiantly accepting those rejected by society. And ultimately, He 'shows His love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8, ESVUK, italics mine). No matter what I've done, He sees me, knows me, and loves me unconditionally. There is always more grace in God than sin in me.

** Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness – Jesus' Meals With Sinners* (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, 2005), p. 128.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

I set my feet on the pilgrim's way for the coming day. Acknowledging its ordinariness, I choose to seek Your face in the people I meet. Accepting its pace, I choose to welcome frustrations as invitations to grace. And anticipating its temptations, I fix my eyes on You who beckons me home.

Yielding Promise

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

*He does not treat me as my sins deserve
or repay me according to my iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him.
(Personalized from Psalm 103:10-11, 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.

February 17 2023 (click for audio)

Resolute

It's Friday the 17th of February. Throughout this week we've been focusing our prayers on the power and purpose of pilgrimage in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, seeking to follow more faithfully in His footsteps, day by day.

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, I recognize a relentless restlessness within my soul, calling me onwards, upwards, and inwards to Yourself. And so I set my heart upon pilgrimage today: my feet on the road, and my eyes upon You.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in the amazing things God has done for me today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 126:

A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

Yes, the LORD has done amazing things for us!

What joy!

Restore our fortunes, LORD,

as streams renew the desert.

Those who plant in tears

will harvest with shouts of joy.

They weep as they go to plant their seed,

but they sing as they return with the harvest.

Psalm 126:3-6 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting upon another momentous journey in the ministry of Jesus...

As the time drew near for him to ascend to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. He sent messengers ahead to a Samaritan village to prepare for his arrival. But the people of the village did not welcome Jesus because he was on his way to Jerusalem. When James and John saw this, they said to Jesus, "Lord, should we call down fire from heaven to burn them up?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them. So they went on to another village.

Luke 9: 51-56 (NLT)

This chapter is considered the turning point in Luke's Gospel and verse 51 its defining moment: 'As the time drew near for him to ascend to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.' In the face of

fierce opposition, Jesus remained grimly determined. How is this possible? Jesus has just come from His moment of transfiguration. The words of the Father are still ringing in his ears, 'This is my son, whom I have chosen.' It is essential, if I am to remain resolute, that I hear the Father speaking these same words over me: I am His child. I have been chosen. I am dearly loved. Nothing less than the revelation of the Father's affirmation ringing in my ears, rooted in my soul, can sustain my determination to persevere as a pilgrim through the twists and turns, disappointments, and frustrations of this road.

Ask

Father, You know the discouragements I've endured, the challenges I'm facing, and the possibilities I'm dreading. But thank You that You love me unconditionally, You have chosen me deliberately, and You believe in me unreservedly.

Pause and pray

Thinking now of someone who seems particularly weary and discouraged, I ask the Father to show me some practical way to remind them of His love and encourage them in their resolve today.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I notice the counter-cultural way Jesus responds to rejection:

As the time drew near for him to ascend to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. He sent messengers ahead to a Samaritan village to prepare for his arrival. But the people of the village did not welcome Jesus because he was on his way to Jerusalem. When James and John saw this, they said to Jesus, "Lord, should we call down fire from heaven to burn them up?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them. So they went on to another village.

Luke 9: 51-56, NLT

'So they went on to another village'. This says so much about Jesus' response to rejection. When the people of that first Samaritan village do not welcome Him, and His disciples threaten to 'call down fire from heaven to burn them up', Jesus just simply, quietly, without any drama, moves on. Am I holding offense in my heart against anyone or anything? Could it possibly be time to simply, without any drama, unclench my fists, relinquish my sense of righteous indignation, and quietly move on?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

I set my feet on the pilgrim's way for the coming day. Acknowledging its ordinariness, I choose to seek Your face in the people I meet. Accepting its pace, I choose to welcome frustrations as invitations to grace. And anticipating its temptations, I fix my eyes on You who beckons me home.

Yielding Promise

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

*Those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.*
Isaiah 40:31 (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.

February 18 2023 (click for audio)

Commission

It's Saturday the 18th of February and today we are concluding our week exploring different aspects of pilgrimage in the life of Jesus, seeking as we do so to follow more faithfully in His footsteps each day.

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, I recognize a relentless restlessness within my soul, calling me onwards, upwards, and inwards to Yourself. And so I set my heart upon pilgrimage today: my feet on the road, and my eyes upon You.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in the house of the Lord today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 134:

*A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.
Oh, praise the LORD, all you servants of the LORD,
 you who serve at night in the house of the LORD.
Lift your hands toward the sanctuary,
 and praise the LORD.
May the Lord, who made heaven and earth,
 bless you from Jerusalem.
Psalm 134:1-3 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on pilgrimage as a paradigm of mission, joining Jesus as He sends His twelve disciples out to preach the gospel...

And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. And he said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.

Luke 9:1-6 (ESV UK)

Jesus sends out His twelve disciples to walk the roads of the region, visiting its villages, living simply, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. In the next chapter, He does the same thing again,

this time with seventy-two of his followers, saying 'Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves' (Luke 10:3) And then, after His resurrection, Jesus sends out his eleven remaining disciples once more, this time to the very ends of the earth (Matthew 28:19).

Ask

I'm struck that every single time Jesus sends out His disciples, He gives them power and authority. Lord, I ask You now to fill me again with Your Spirit. Thank you for the power and authority you have given me to preach and perform miracles. Give me, I pray, practical opportunities to proclaim and demonstrate the good news of Your kingdom today.

Pause and pray

Two thousand years after Christ's Great Commission, more than 7,000 people groups still haven't been reached by the good news of His gospel. This is more than 40% of the world population.* I pray now for a mass mobilization of courageous, cross-cultural mission in our day.

* The Joshua Project, <https://joshuaproject.net/>

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 he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. And he said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.

Luke 9:1-6 (ESV UK)

Columbanus, the great sixth century Irish apostle, who obeyed Christ's commission by establishing monasteries throughout Europe, once wrote a powerful reflection on the way of the pilgrim upon the road through life –

What are you, human life?

You are the road to life, not life itself...

You are to be traversed but not inhabited.

For no one dwells on a road, but travels it

So that those who walk upon the road

*May dwell in their homeland.***

** Columbanus of Bangor, from the fifth of his published sermons.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

I set my feet on the pilgrim's way for the coming day. Acknowledging its ordinariness, I choose to seek Your face in the people I meet. Accepting its pace, I choose to welcome frustrations as invitations to grace. And anticipating its temptations, I fix my eyes on You who beckons me home.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me promises me His presence today, forever, and wherever I go, saying –

'Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Matthew 28:20 (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.

February 19 2023 (click for audio)

Ancient Pilgrimage: Sabbath Prayer

today is Sunday the 19th of February, traditionally a day of rest on which we interrupt our usual daily pattern with a shorter, simpler time of prayer.

Throughout this week we have been exploring the theme of pilgrimage, but today we take a break from the rigors of the road simply to enjoy the fact that in Christ we are already home. The one who sends us out invites us now to 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest' (Mark 6:31). Elsewhere He says:

'Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.'

John 14:1-3 (ESV UK)

Pause and pray

'Going home is a lifelong journey,' writes Henri Nouwen. 'As we walk home we often realize how long the way is. But let us not be discouraged. Jesus walks with us and speaks to us on the road. When we listen carefully we discover that we are already home while on the way.'*

* Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2006).

T.S. Eliot makes a similar point in his poem Little Gidding which is about a community of prayer:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started.**

** T.S. Eliot, from 'Little Gidding', *Four Quartets* (Gardners Books; Main edition, April 30, 2001), originally published 1943.

Throughout the week I strain, struggle and strive, but on the Sabbath, I stop to count my blessings. I rest from my labors, recognizing the many ways in which, as Nouwen and Eliot say, I have already arrived; I am already home with Christ in the heart of the Father. And so I take time now to thank God for His presence with me and for the sufficiency of His many blessings in my life.

Pause and pray

I pray today for the worldwide church - the house of God - opening its doors to so many weary pilgrims:

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

Jesus, we pray for those who are lonely or on the margins today, and especially for those who are attending church for the first time or the last time. May they find themselves noticed and loved.

And for those who are nowhere near a church meeting today, send us out to bring the prodigals home.

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

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

Pause and pray

And now I dedicate the coming week to the Lord, accepting His invitation and offering Him my heart and my home in return:

Thank You, Father, for welcoming me home into Your heart.

Love me this week as I welcome You home into my heart.

Thank You, Jesus, for standing and knocking at the door of my life.

Befriend me again this week as I open the shameful and vulnerable parts of myself to You.

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for brooding over the chaos of my world and within my inner being,

Fill me this week as I seek to host You with generous attention and joy.

Sabbath Blessing

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

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

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

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

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

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

February 20 2023 (click on audio)

Unexpected Pilgrimage

Today is Monday the 20th of February, and for the first part of this week we are 'setting our hearts on pilgrimage' (Psalm 84:5).

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, I recognize a relentless restlessness within my soul, calling me onwards, upwards and inwards to Yourself. And so I set my heart upon pilgrimage and my feet on the road, my hopes upon heaven and my eyes upon You.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

Pause and pray

Today I am reflecting on the children of Israel's unexpected journey.

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt." But God led the people round by the way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle.

Exodus 13:17-18 (ESV UK)

The path to the promised land seemed straightforward, but it cut right through enemy territory. God knew, better than they did, what they were up against, and the state of their hearts as well as the strength of their arms. He decided to take them the long way round. Our contemporary culture values expediency, but this story indicates that shorter is not necessarily better.

Ask

In my life's journey, as I move towards my goals, does it seem as if God is taking me the long way round? How do I feel about that?

God, I give You my unmet expectations, my frustrations, and my questions. Is there something that You know about me that I don't? Something that You are doing in me that I don't yet understand or appreciate? I listen now to receive Your perspective.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for friends or family who seem to be wandering around the wilderness, rather than making a beeline towards their desired destination. Would You both strengthen and shape them on the journey. Would You help them to trust Your guidance and leadership along the way.

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 Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt." But God led the people round by the way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle.
Exodus 13:17-18 (ESV UK)

God was up to something far beyond just getting the children of Israel from point A to point B. On their pilgrimage through the wilderness, He wanted to shape them on the way.

Author Daniel McGregor writes:

*It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the Israelites' wilderness experience to biblical history. The wilderness wandering was the formative experience for the Israelites, repeatedly referenced throughout Scripture. From the time in the wilderness came the Law, a way of worship, and a culture distinct from their neighbors.**

* Daniel S. McGregor, *Holy Dark Places: Wilderness and Exile in the Christian Experience* (Gonzalez, FL: Energon Publications, 2017, Kindle Edition), loc. 158.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, when my road takes an unexpected turn, I trust Your good leadership. You know my heart. You know the path before me. Ultimately, You are my way, Jesus. I trust in 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 Isaiah:

And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it”, when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

Isaiah 30:21 (ESV 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.

February 21 2023 (click on audio)

The God Who Goes Ahead

Today is Tuesday the 21st of February, and today we are wrapping up our exploration of the practice of pilgrimage. 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, I recognize a relentless restlessness within my soul, calling me onwards, upwards and inwards to Yourself. And so I set my heart upon pilgrimage and my feet on the road, my hopes upon heaven and my eyes upon You.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God’s life-giving light today, joining with the ancient praise of all God’s people in the words of Psalm 56...

*I will fulfill my vows to you, O God,
and will offer a sacrifice of thanks for your help.
For you have rescued me from death;
you have kept my feet from slipping.
So now I can walk in your presence, O God,
in your life-giving light.*

Psalm 56:12-13 (NLT)

Pause and pray

God is taking the children of Israel on an unexpected journey through the wilderness. But although the path is unfamiliar, they are not alone.

And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

Exodus 13:21-22 (ESV UK)

In my youth back in Canada, I went on a lot of canoe trips. We would set out into the wilderness, finding our way with a map and compass. Sometimes it could be challenging to get our bearings and I remember how relieved I was when there was someone on the trip who had been that way before and could show me where to go.

Ask

Am I feeling disoriented? Is it hard to get my bearings right now?

God, theoretically I know that You are with me, but today I ask for perceivable signs of Your presence. Give me eyes to see You as You go ahead of me on my life's journey.

Pause and pray

God, I pray for young adults who are seeking direction for their future, whether that be for their education, work, or choice of community. Thank you that You have gone ahead of them. I pray that they would recognize Your presence along the way, and be able to trust and to follow You. Today I pray for a particular young adult that I Know.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I try to picture it in my mind's eye. I feel the press of the crowd around me. The heat of the Sinai sun, the smell of the livestock, the taste of desert dust on my lips. And ahead? I see the cloud of Your presence.

And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

Exodus 13:21-22 (ESV UK)

If I'm honest, I feel a bit jealous of the children of Israel. I wish God's presence was that evident in my own life's journey. Often for me it feels as if God's proximity and leading is more like a gentle whiff on the breeze, not a towering, swirling flame of fire.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, when it's hard to perceive Your presence, instead of striving and trying harder, I choose to relax, quieten my heart, and just put one foot in front of the other. Today I set my heart on pilgrimage. You go before me, and I trust that You will make Yourself known to me.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, I share in the confidence of the Psalmist in Psalm 16:

*You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures for evermore.*

Psalm 16:11 (ESV 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.

February 22 2023 (click on audio)

Ash Wednesday

Today is Wednesday the 22nd of February, also known as Ash Wednesday. Many Christians around the world will be marking today as the first day of Lent: a season of fasting, examining our lives, and preparing ourselves for Easter.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

*Father God, today I remember that I came from dust, and to dust I will return. I greet You with gratitude and welcome Your Spirit who gives me life.**

**Prayer inspired by Genesis 3:19 and Romans 8:2.*

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 103...

*Let all that I am praise the LORD;
may I never forget the good things he does for me.*

*He forgives all my sins
and heals all my diseases.
He redeems me from death
and crowns me with love and tender mercies.*

Psalm 103:2-4 (NLT)

Pause and pray

In the Bible, ashes symbolize mortality (Gen. 3:19), are used to express grief (Isa. 61:3) and are also a sign of repentance (Luke 10:13). At the beginning of Lent, some church traditions burn palms used in the previous year's Palm Sunday celebration and use the ash to mark a cross on the forehead of members of their congregation. This reminds them of their mortality and prompts them to examine their hearts and get right with God.

Whether I am from a church that takes part in Ash Wednesday or not, I pause today to join with my brothers and sisters around the globe, to reflect on my life, and to ask God for forgiveness.

Ask

I welcome You, Spirit of Truth. Help me to look inward and see myself clearly today.

I use the final lines of Psalm 139 and pray:

Search me, God, and know my heart...

Psalm 139:23a (NIV UK)

Where is my heart set on something other than God?

Pause and pray

Returning to Psalm 139, I pray:

...test me and know my anxious thoughts.

Psalm 139:23b (NIV UK)

I bring my worries to God, and I ask for peace.

Pause and pray

Continuing through the Psalm, I pray:

See if there is any offensive way in me...

Psalm 139:24a (NIV UK)

Where have I sinned and failed to walk in God's way of love?

Pause and pray

And finally I ask:

[God], lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalm 139:24b (NIV UK)

Holy Spirit, I am sorry. I welcome Your forgiveness, and and I ask to be led in your everlasting way today

Pause and pray

Yield

For many, Ash Wednesday is the beginning of a season of fasting. Some people give up sugary or fatty foods, while others choose a well-loved treat, social media, alcohol, or TV, to go without for the 40 days of Lent. Whenever I give something up, it tastes all the sweeter when I finally sink my teeth into it at the end of my fast. Is God inviting me to give something up this Lent to help make resurrection Sunday all the sweeter to celebrate?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I yield to Your work in my life with the words of Psalm 51...

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

If you confess your sins, I am faithful and just and will forgive you your sins and purify you from all unrighteousness.
1 John 1:9 (NIV UK) - adapted and personalized

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.

February 23 2023 (click on audio)

The End of the World?

Today is Thursday the 23rd of February. Over the next forty days, throughout the season of Lent, I'm joining Jesus on His journey towards the cross, as described in the Gospel of Mark.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, light of the world, as I follow You today, would You illuminate the darkness within me and around me. Show me Your presence and Your path as I welcome the light of Your life. (Adapted from John 8:12)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's saving help today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 61...

*O God, listen to my cry!
Hear my prayer!
From the ends of the earth,
I cry to you for help
when my heart is overwhelmed.
Lead me to the towering rock of safety,
for you are my safe refuge,
a fortress where my enemies cannot reach me.
Let me live forever in your sanctuary,
safe beneath the shelter of your wings!*

Psalm 61:1-3 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Jesus is making His final trip to Jerusalem with His disciples. Today they find themselves at the temple.

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when

all these things are about to be accomplished?"

Mark 13:1-4 (ESV UK)

Many years ago I made a trip to Jerusalem. A highlight for me was a time of prayer at what remained of the Temple of Jerusalem, the Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall. Surrounded by praying pilgrims, the wall rises impressively as a reminder of its former glory.

Jesus' disciples knew the Temple in its heyday. They were impressed with its splendor and, when Jesus informed them of its imminent destruction, they wondered if that meant the end of the world was coming.

Ask

I take a few moments to think about my church building, if I have one. Perhaps it's not as impressive or imposing as the Temple in Jerusalem, but for many, and possibly for me, it's the center of religious life and expression.

Jesus, how might I respond if You told me that I would soon be without a church building?

Pause and pray

God, I pray for Your Church. Forgive us when we mix up the place and the people, and think that church is merely somewhere we go, rather than a family that we belong to. Lord, I thank You that, whether in a building or not, we, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to [You] through Jesus Christ (1 PRTER 2:5)

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 as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?"

Mark 13:1-4 (ESV UK)

During the pandemic, there were a variety of perspectives on what was happening with the Church. Some argued that with government restrictions, the Church had been closed. Others asserted that it was only the buildings that had been closed, but that the Church itself, the family life and worship of the people of God, flourished in homes and online platforms, which my church affectionately called 'the Upper Zoom'.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, You say You will build Your Church and the gates of hell will not overcome it (Matt. 16:18). I'm grateful that You are the head of the Church (Colossians 1:18) and I invite You to come and build as You will, where You will. I yield myself to Your good leadership.

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:

*In [me] you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which I live by my Spirit.
Ephesians 2:22 (NIVUK) - adapted and personalized*

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.

February 24 2023 (click on audio)

Birth Pains

Today is Friday the 24th of February, and this week we are on the journey with Jesus towards the cross, as told in the Gospel of Mark.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, light of the world, as I follow You today, would You illuminate the darkness within me and around me. Show me Your presence and Your path as I welcome the light of Your life. (Adapted from John 8:12)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's creative power today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 90...

*Lord, through all the generations
you have been our home!
Before the mountains were born,
before you gave birth to the earth and the world,
from beginning to end, you are God.
Psalm 90:1-2 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Jesus has told His disciples that their beloved Temple will soon be destroyed. They are worried about what else might happen - is it the end of the world?

And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains."

Mark 13:5-8 (ESV UK)

Jesus speaks of future disasters - wars, earthquakes, famines. Curiously, He doesn't describe them as death throes, but instead, as birth pains.

Theologian Tom Wright writes:

*The picture of birth pangs had been used for centuries by Jews as they reflected on the way in which, as they believed, their God was intending to bring to birth his new world, his new creation, the age to come in which justice and peace, mercy and truth would at last flourish.**

* Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2001), p. 177.

Ask

God, I wonder, when my life seems to be falling apart, are You really putting it back together? Is it death that I am experiencing, or new life? What are You birthing in seemingly cataclysmic moments?

Pause and pray

God, I pray for someone I know who is in the midst of what seems to be a death - job loss, health challenges, unforeseen difficulties. God, birth Your good purposes in and through them. May justice, peace, mercy, and truth come to them, I pray

Pause and pray

Yield

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

And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains."

Mark 13:5-8 (ESV UK)

This passage reads like today's news. The Bible identifies the three enemies of God and humankind as the world, the flesh, and the devil (Ephesians 2:2-3a). It's easy enough these days to see where these adversaries are running amok. It can take a deeper discernment, however, to see what God is birthing in the midst of it all.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, I submit to You my limited and earthly perspective, and I ask that You would grant me a heavenly perspective. Help me to watch for signs of life amidst the signs of death. You are the resurrection and the life, Jesus, and somehow, in some mysterious way, You are making me, and all things, new.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, I lay hold of God's perspective from Revelation 21:

“I will wipe every tear from your eyes. There will be no more death” or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away... I am making everything new!
Revelation 21:4-5a (NIVUK) - adapted and personalized

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.

February 25 2023 (click on audio)

Holy Boldness

Today is Saturday the 25th of February, and we are in the season of Lent: on the journey with Jesus towards the cross and the resurrection.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, light of the world, as I follow You today, would You illuminate the darkness within me and around me. Show me Your presence and Your path as I welcome the light of Your life. (Adapted from John 8:12)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's majesty today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 93...

The LORD is king! He is robed in majesty.

Indeed, the LORD is robed in majesty and armed with strength.

The world stands firm

and cannot be shaken.

Your throne, O LORD, has stood from time immemorial.

You yourself are from the everlasting past.

Your reign, O LORD, is holy forever and ever.

Psalm 93:1,2,5b (NLT)

Pause and pray

Yesterday Jesus warned His disciples about future cataclysms, and today He's got more challenging news...

"But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

Mark 13:9-13 (ESV UK)

Jesus is not speaking metaphorically here. After His death and resurrection, all but one of his twelve disciples will end up being martyred for their faith. Some were crucified, others beheaded or tortured to death – many in far flung nations, like India or Ethiopia, where they went to proclaim the gospel to all nations.

Ask

Are there times when I'm challenged to account for my faith, perhaps in a hostile workplace, online community, or even in my family?

God, I give You my anxiety about these situations. I trust that You will give me what is needed so that, as the Apostle Paul writes in Colossians, my conversation would always be full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that I may know how to answer everyone (Colossians 4:6).

Pause and pray

Open Doors, a charity that supports the persecuted church, estimates that there are 400,000 Christians in North Korea – some 1.5 percent of the population. About 50-70,000 of these Christians are in horrendous prisons and labor camps.*

* <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/north-korea>

God, I pray for believers in North Korea. Give them words to speak, courage, resilience, and endurance. Give them joy in Your presence in the midst of hardship, and may the gospel be proclaimed throughout that nation.

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.

"But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

Mark 13:9-13 (ESV UK)

The worst persecution I experience as a follower of Jesus is some people holding me at arms' length, or the occasional cranky comment online. I've not been brought to trial, thrown in prison, or beaten for my faith, and I sometimes wonder, if everyone seems to approve of what I do, perhaps I am playing it too safe?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God, I give You my anxiety about what it might cost me to boldly proclaim and demonstrate Your good news. Exchange my fear for courage, my sense of inadequacy for confidence and holy boldness. May I be a champion of the gospel and proclaim it wherever You send 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 Jeremiah:

"I am with you and will save you," declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 30:11a

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.

February 26 2023 (click on audio)

A Sabbath Prayer Lent 2023

Today is Sunday the 26th of February, a day of rest on which we interrupt our weekday pattern and return to a shorter, simpler time of prayer.

During the season of Lent on Sundays, we anticipate Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday, just six weeks away. Throughout the past week I've been reflecting on the book of Mark, following Jesus on His way to the cross. Today however, I'm skipping to the end of the Easter story, celebrating a risen Christ who has delivered us from the cruel bondage of sin and death.

The commandment to rest on the Sabbath was given to the children of Israel - a people God delivered from slavery, a life of unrelenting toil.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

Exodus 20:8-10 (NIV UK)

The gift of the Sabbath reminds me that I am free. Or am I?

Author Adele Calhoun challenges: 'If you aren't resting, you are a slave to something.'*

* Quoted by Ruth Haley Barton in *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest* (Transforming Resources), (InterVarsity Press, Kindle Edition), p. 27.

Cole Arthur Riley, creator of Black Liturgies, writes: 'Rest is an act of defiance... the audacity to face the demands of this world and proclaim, we will not be owned.'**

** Cole Arthur Riley, *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation and the Stories That Make Us* (London: John Murray Press, Kindle Edition), p. 157.

I take a moment to reflect in God's presence, am I able to rest on this Sabbath day? If not, why not?

Pause and pray

God, is there anything I am a slave to? Is there anything that owns me?

Pause and Pray

Galatians declares:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1 (NIV UK)

Jesus, I thank You that You have set me free from slavery to sin and death.

Father, You have liberated me from slavery to the demands of the world.

Holy Spirit, I celebrate the freedom You have given me, and today I declare, 'I will not be owned!'

Cole Arthur Riley goes on to say, 'Rest is not the reward of our liberation, nor something we lay hold of once we are free. It is the path that delivers us there'.***

*** Cole Arthur Riley, *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation and the Stories That Make Us* (London: John Murray Press, Kindle Edition), p. 151.

I take a moment now to root these prayers in my life and my community. I pray now for someone I know who needs to experience deliverance from bondage, and the gift of God's rest today.

Pause and pray

Sabbath Blessing

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

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

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

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

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

Amen****

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

February 27 2023 (click for audio)

Time To run

Today is Monday the 27th of February, and this Lent we are completing our 'Follow Me' series, praying through every verse in the Gospel of Mark. As we prepare to celebrate Easter, we are reflecting on some of Jesus' final words to His disciples, and on His journey to the cross.

Pause

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

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, light of the world, as I follow You today, would You illuminate the darkness within me and around me. Show me Your presence and Your path as I welcome the light of Your life.(Adapted from John 8:12)

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's strength and protection today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 91...

*Those who live in the shelter of the Most High
will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty...
He will cover you with his feathers.
He will shelter you with his wings.
His faithful promises are your armor and protection.
Psalm 91:1,4 (NLT)*

Pause and pray

Today I return to a conversation between Jesus and His disciples as He warns them about an approaching disaster...

"But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not happen in winter."

Mark 13:14-18 (ESV UK)

Jesus' warning is confusing and disturbing. Just a few verses earlier, He encouraged His disciples to stand strong and stay alert through the challenges they would soon face. But now Jesus warns His friends about a future disaster and urges that when they see the sign of its coming, they are not to stay and endure, but to escape Jerusalem, to run as fast and as far as possible.

Ask

What are the challenges (or maybe even disasters) that I am facing right now?

Jesus, is this a time when I should stand and endure, or is this a time when I should run, removing myself from the situation?

Pause and pray

Jesus gave His disciples a sign to look out for, an event that would warn them that disaster was coming.

Lord, open the eyes and ears of Your Church. Give us the gifts of prophecy and discernment(1 Cor. 12:10).Help us pay attention to the signs of the times, and give us wisdom to know how to respond to them.

Pause and pray

Yield

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

“But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not happen in winter.”

Mark 13:14-18 (ESV UK)

The ‘abomination of desolation’ is a phrase Jesus borrowed from the book of Daniel (12:11). Many commentators believe that Daniel was prophesying about the events of 168 BC when foreign armies invaded Jerusalem and desecrated the altar in the Temple. Commentators suggest that Jesus used this phrase, and the memory of this event, to prophesy another disaster: the Roman siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple that happened in 70 AD. *

* See Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, SPCK, (London, 2004) p180 onward, Donald English, *The Message of Mark*, Intervarsity Press, (Nottingham, 1992) p204 onward and R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., (Grand Rapids, 2002) p498 onward.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, I know that following You does not protect me from difficulty or disaster, but I thank You that I am never alone, even when the worst happens. Today I choose to place my trust in You, whatever my future may hold.

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 Psalms:

*I will rescue you...
I will protect you...
When you call on me, I will answer;
I will be with you in trouble.*
Adapted from Psalm 91:14-15a (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.

February 28 2023 (click for audio)

Empty Promises

Today is tuesday the 28th of February, and this week we are praying through the warnings of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. 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 Mark’s Gospel. ‘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

Jesus, light of the world, as I follow You today, would You illuminate the darkness within me and around me. Show me Your presence and Your path as I welcome the light of Your life.(Adapted from John 8:12)

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 Psalm 91...

This I declare about the LORD:

*He alone is my refuge, my place of safety;
he is my God, and I trust him.*

*For he will rescue you from every trap
and protect you from deadly disease.*

Psalm 91:2-3 (NLT)

Pause and pray

Today I return to Jesus’ prophecy about the Roman siege of Jerusalem in AD 70. Yesterday, I reflected on His warning to the disciples to leave Jerusalem as soon as they saw disaster coming. Today, Jesus describes the confusion and terror that await those who stay behind...

“For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. For false christ and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.”

Mark 13:19-23 (ESV UK)

The people who were trapped during the siege of Jerusalem experienced hunger, violence, and death. In the midst of terrible suffering, the historian Josephus tells of multiple wannabe-Messiahs who tried to gather a following by promising rescue.* Jesus, foreseeing all that would happen, warned His disciples not to be led astray by empty promises in times of trouble.

*Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: SPCK, 2004), pp. 182-183.

Ask

Who do I listen to? What friends, family, or even celebrities, do I allow to shape my thinking and influence my decisions in challenging times?

Jesus, are there any people I need to stop listening to?

Pause and pray

There are many people caught up in conflicts today. I particularly pray for the people of Yemen, living through the largest humanitarian crisis in the world...

Lord, shorten the days of this conflict. Rescue these people from the suffering and hunger caused by war.

(Want to keep praying? Explore 24-7 Prayer's guide to praying for Yemen)

Pause and pray

Yield

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

"For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. For false christ and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand."

Mark 13:19-23 (ESV UK)

What word or phrase jumped out at me from Jesus' warning?

I am struck by the fact that God was so moved by the suffering of His people that He chose to intervene by shortening the days of the conflict. In the midst of war and destruction, God worked for peace.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

God of peace, my perspective is so limited. I find it hard to see beyond present suffering. But today, I choose to trust that You see further, and You love more faithfully and fiercely than I ever could. Thank You that You are working for my good, even in the worst of circumstances.

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 Psalms:

*If you make the LORD your refuge,
if you make the Most High your shelter,
no evil will conquer you;
no plague will come near your home.*
Psalm 91:9-10 (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.