

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 other members of 24/7 Prayer

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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

April 2023

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Audio for Each Day in MP3 Format

Month of April 2023

April 01 2023 (click for audio)

Abuse of Power

Today is Saturday the 1st of April, and this week we are in the book of Mark, responding to Jesus' invitation to follow Him – all the way 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 lament with the Psalmist today, joining with the ancient cries of all God's people in the words of Psalm 22...

But I am a worm and not a man.

I am scorned and despised by all!

Everyone who sees me mocks me.

They sneer and shake their heads, saying,

"Is this the one who relies on the LORD?

Then let the LORD save him!

If the LORD loves him so much,

let the LORD rescue him!"

Psalm 22:6-8 (NLT)

Pause and pray

The priests have won. Jesus stands condemned. And His torture begins.

And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him.

Mark 15:16-19 (ESV UK)

No matter how many times I read this, I cringe at the cruelty and brutality of the soldiers. At their abuse of their power and authority. At the humiliation and harm done to their innocent victim. And I hope that I always will. That I will never get used to it. That I will never be numb to and detached from the suffering of others, especially the powerless tormented by the hands of their abusers.

Ask

Jesus, where my heart has grown hard and calloused, where I have become numb to the suffering of others, I pray that You would soften my heart. May I weep with those who weep, and may I love justice with the same passion that You do.

Pause and pray

Lord, I pray for countries whose military or police are corrupt, act in unjust ways, and harm the innocent. Restrain evil, change unjust policies, convict the hearts of the perpetrators and protect and rescue the powerless, 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 the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him.

Mark 15:16-19 (ESV UK)

The soldiers do not know who they are dealing with - they have no understanding of who Jesus actually is. It can be tempting to be dismissive, to make light of and even to mock what we don't understand. Have I ever been guilty of that myself?

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, would You give me eyes to recognize the ways You are at work - in my life and through people around me. Forgive me when I am dismissive, make light of, or perhaps even make fun of, the things that are sacred to 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 2 Corinthians 7:

Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret ... see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal...

2 Corinthians 7:10,11 (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.

April 02 2023 (click for audio)

Palm Sunday

Today is Sunday the 2nd of April, known around the world as Palm Sunday. On this day of rest and remembrance, we leave our usual P.R.A.Y. rhythms behind and pray in a simpler way.

Today, Christians all over the world are celebrating Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the start of Holy Week. I've been reflecting this week on the book of Mark, going deeper into the story of Jesus' last fateful days in Jerusalem. Today I rewind to the moment when Jesus entered the city.

I start this time of prayer by pausing to welcome Jesus into my life afresh by His Spirit.

Pause and pray

I pause and reflect on Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem...

The next day the huge crowd that had arrived for the Feast heard that Jesus was entering Jerusalem. They broke off palm branches and went out to meet him. And they cheered:

Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in God's name!

Yes! The King of Israel!

Jesus got a young donkey and rode it, just as the Scripture has it:

No fear, Daughter Zion:

*See how your king comes,
riding a donkey's colt.*

John 12:12-15 (MSG)

Roman emperors would ride their finest stallions into a conquered city. Presidents today travel in vast armored cavalcades. But the King of kings sits humbly on a donkey and prepares to die.

Lord, give me opportunities to practice humility: to serve, to listen, and to prefer others this Holy Week.

Pause and pray

The crowds shouted 'Hosanna', a cry from Psalm 118 that translates as, 'Lord, save us!'

Father, as Your Church gathers today around the world, I join with crowds in Jerusalem and cry out Hosanna! Lord, save us from being inwardly focused; propel us out to tell the story of Your love this Easter.

Jesus, I pray on behalf of my friends and family members who don't know You and I say Hosanna! Lord, save us - make Yourself known to each of them this week.

Spirit, on this Palm Sunday, I lift the leaders of my nation to You and I pray Hosanna! Lord, save them, draw them closer to Jesus. May their leadership be characterized by His wisdom and humility.

Pause and pray

The Apostle Paul describes the humility of Jesus in his letter to the church in Philippi:

Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.

Philippians 2:5-8 (MSG)

And so, I use the words of Thomas Merton as my prayer, today:

Lord, give me humility in which alone is rest,
and deliver me from pride which is the heaviest of burdens.
Possess my whole heart and soul with the simplicity of love.
Occupy my whole life with the one thought and the one desire of love,
that I may love not for the sake of merit, not for the sake of perfection,
not for the sake of virtue, not for the sake of sanctity, but for You alone. *

*Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications Inc, 2003) p. 47.

Amen.

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.

April 03 2023 (click for audio)

Inconvenient Encounter

Today is Monday the 3rd of April. This is Holy Week and we are praying through the final verses of Mark's Gospel, focusing on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Pause

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

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, as I join You on Your journey to Calvary, give me eyes to perceive You in the shadows of my circumstance, faith to believe in Your perfect plan, and grace to receive Your mercies anew. Lord, carry me through the darkness of these difficult days to the life and light to come.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's redemption today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 69...

Praise him, O heaven and earth,
the seas and all that move in them.

For God will save Jerusalem
and rebuild the towns of Judah.

His people will live there
and settle in their own land.

The descendants of those who obey him will inherit the land,
and those who love him will live there in safety.

Psalm 69:34-36 (NLT)

Today I'm reflecting on the cross Jesus carried from trial to crucifixion, the weary steps He walked, weaving through the crowds, ears ringing with their deafening chants of mockery. I'm reflecting on the weight of that cross on His back, the weight not just of a wooden beam but of all the world's sin and suffering.

And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him. And they compelled a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

Mark 15:20-23 (ESV UK)

Simon of Cyrene, a passer-by according to Mark, carries the cross of Christ, whose strength had failed. A passer-by, thrust into the suffering of God that would turn the hinge of cosmic history.

Was this an inconvenience at first? Simon was likely in Jerusalem for Passover, and certainly this exchange profoundly interrupted the very celebration he'd traveled 700 miles – over a month's journey – to attend.

Was it life-changing in the end, to accompany the Saviour on His road to suffering victory?

And isn't this how it tends to work with God? What starts as a terrible inconvenience is converted into a life-changing invitation for those daring to pay attention.

Ask

Jesus, open my eyes to see You today. At Your invitation, may I embrace interruption and inconvenience as a means of transformation.

Father, I call to mind a person inconveniencing me at the moment. I pray for Your blessing on them, and I ask that, even now, I would see Christ's face in theirs, embracing inconvenience as an invitation from Your Spirit.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I engage imaginatively with this scene, placing myself in the story.

And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him. And they compelled a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

Mark 15:20-23 (ESV UK)

At His birth, Magi traveled from the east, honoring Jesus' arrival with an offer of myrrh, among other gifts. Thirty-three years later, His executioners offered him myrrh, as He hung on the cross. What was first given as a gift has now become a curse. The whole of the biblical drama encapsulated in a simple offer of myrrh – a gift become cursed.

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, thank You for the gift of life to the full! I repent of my part in cursing Your good creation. Like Adam and Eve before me, I have chosen my own way. Thank You for drinking my cup of suffering that I might again taste of true life. As the magi did at first, I offer back to You as a gift what You've given me - my whole 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 Philippians:

I began a good work in you, and I will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
Adapted from Philippians 1:6 (NIV UK)

Closing Prayer

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

April 04 2023 (click for audio)

The King of the Jews

Today is Tuesday the 4th of April and this week we are praying through the final verses of Mark's Gospel, focusing on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. As usual, 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.

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, as I join You on Your journey to Calvary, give me eyes to perceive You in the shadows of my circumstance, faith to believe in Your perfect plan, and grace to receive Your mercies anew. Lord, carry me through the darkness of these difficult days to the life and light to come.

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 111...

Praise the LORD!

I will thank the LORD with all my heart

as I meet with his godly people.

How amazing are the deeds of the LORD!

All who delight in him should ponder them.

Everything he does reveals his glory and majesty.

His righteousness never fails.

Psalm 111:1-3 (NLT)

Today I'm reflecting on Jesus' crucifixion, and the symbolic significance of the Creator dying with His own creation...

And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.

Mark 15:24-27 (ESV UK)

The question 'Why did Jesus die?' is inseparable from the question 'What was so threatening about Jesus that they would kill Him?' Jesus proclaimed a kingdom – one of forgiveness for the contrite, sight for the blind, freedom for the captive, and good news for the poor. And that is great for the contrite, blind, captive, and poor. But for those busily building their own kingdoms, promoting their own royalty, an alternative kingdom was not a welcome arrival but a threatening intrusion.

My willingness to lay down my own kingdom-building, to acknowledge my need for a Saviour, determines if 'King of the Jews' emerges from my mouth as praise or, like those who posted the sign over His thorn-crowned head, as accusation.

Ask

King Jesus, I lay down my name, my striving, my kingdom-building, and I offer my imagination for Your thoughts, my hands for Your work, my mouth for Your praise.

King Jesus, I pray as You taught us: Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. I call to mind now a particular person, place, or situation where Your kingdom is lacking. Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I listen afresh for the Spirit to speak to me through the word.

And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.

Mark 15:24-27 (ESV UK)

I am struck by the word 'with' in this passage... And with Him they crucified two robbers. With - If there's a word to sum up the life of Jesus that has to be it. At His birth, they called Him Immanuel,

God with us...

Born with us

Walked with us

Talked with us

Lived with us

Suffered (and suffers) with us

In this phrase is the great scandal and great comfort of Jesus. Only Christianity gives us a God who is with us. Only Christianity gives us a God with scars.

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, though I do not always fully understand You, I choose today to fully trust You. I trust the God who refuses to offer platitudes from a safe distance, but who climbs down into the mess with me – the mess of our world, the mess of my life, the mess of my suffering.

Yielding Promise

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

‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’

Hebrews 13:5 (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.

April 05 2023 (click for audio)

Save Yourself

Today is Wednesday the 5th of April, and this week we are praying through the final verses of Mark's Gospel, focusing on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Pause

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

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, as I join You on Your journey to Calvary, give me eyes to perceive You in the shadows of my circumstance, faith to believe in Your perfect plan, and grace to receive Your mercies anew. Lord, carry me through the darkness of these difficult days to the life and light to come.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to reflect on God's mercy today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 16...

I will bless the LORD who guides me;

even at night my heart instructs me.

I know the LORD is always with me.

I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.

Psalm 16:7-8 (NLT)

Today I'm reflecting on the staggering wonder of a God who would suffer – a God of incomprehensible power whose most powerful act came not through action but surrender.

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

Mark 15:29-32 (ESV UK)

For 33 years, Jesus gave us His activity, His life. He was always active, always doing... teaching, working miracles, bringing justice, comforting, loving. But His final 24 hours represent a distinct shift.

He is led away.

He is questioned.

He is tortured, whipped, mocked, helped in carrying His cross.

He is nailed to it.

Jesus is no longer doing. He is allowing.

Jesus is no longer acting. He is being acted upon.

The greatest gift God ever gave us was not in His action but His surrender.

In Jesus' passion, He gave us a gift we could not receive by His action.

Ask

Jesus, thank You that You are a God of action and surrender, miraculous power and victorious suffering. Help me, today, to meet You in both, to join Your renewal in my activity, and to equally join Your renewal in my passivity, my suffering, my surrender.

Jesus, I pray now for the suffering, sick, oppressed, and hurting – individuals I know by name and people groups I know only from afar. I pray that they would know, even now in the midst of their pain, the God who suffers with us to bring an end to our pain.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage I listen again for the whisper of the Spirit through the word.

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

Mark 15:29-32 (ESV UK)

I am struck by the words of the mocking priests, 'come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.' A few verses later, another onlooker had the opposite reaction, 'Surely this man was the son of God.' It was not by miraculously coming down from the cross, but by willingly remaining on it, that Jesus revealed the character of God. Jesus' most powerful healing came not through supernatural power but the wounding of His own body. In the words of Isaiah, 'by his wounds we are healed' (Isaiah 53:5).

Yielding Prayer

God, I repent of my demands for Your action and my certainty that I know best how to bring healing to myself and Your world. You are the wounded healer. Even now, as I imagine running my hands over Your wounds as Thomas did, fill me with faith, hope, and love.

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:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:18 (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.

April 06 2023 (click for audio)

Maundy Thursday

Today is Thursday the 6th of April, a day known as Maundy Thursday, set aside throughout church history for remembrance and reflection on Jesus' Last Supper. However, we are returning to Mark's account of the crucifixion, preparing ourselves for Good Friday.

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.

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, as I join You on Your journey to Calvary, give me eyes to perceive You in the shadows of my circumstance, faith to believe in Your perfect plan, and grace to receive Your mercies anew. Lord, carry me through the darkness of these difficult days to the life and light to come.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's family today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 22...

I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.

I will praise you among your assembled people...

For he has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy.

He has not turned his back on them,
but has listened to their cries for help.

Psalm 22:22,24 (NLT)

Today I return to the story of Jesus' sacrificial death...

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down."

Mark 15:33-36 (ESV UK)

On the cross, Jesus didn't pray new words. He was borrowing from the Psalms, quoting David's prayer written some 1500 years earlier. Scripture is careful to note, though, that Jesus didn't pray in the Hebrew David wrote in. Jesus prayed in Aramaic, the common language of the streets and schoolyards. By praying in Aramaic, Jesus was personalizing the prayer. He wasn't analytically connecting biblical dots, but crying out across history, past, present, and future, 'Where are you, God?' Jesus, Himself, sharing in the experience we all know too well — the feeling of being forgotten by God.

Ask

God, this morning as I reflect on Jesus' words from the cross, I invite You to bring to mind the places in my life where I feel forgotten by You – to show me those places of painfully felt absence, that You might fill them with Your comforting presence.

Now, Father, I bring to mind someone in my life who feels forgotten by You at the moment – someone waiting on a prayer, someone grieving or alone, someone in the midst of suffering. I pray, Jesus, that You'd meet them today, that they'd know that they're not forgotten, they're not alone.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I reflect again on Jesus' cry from the cross...

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down."

Mark 15:33-36 (ESV UK)

Jesus prayed the first line of Psalm 22. But everyone in the majority-Jewish crowd would have recited this prayer from childhood. They all knew it by heart. Jesus prayed verse 1 as a shorthand way of referencing the whole prayer, a prayer that opens in isolation and turmoil but ends in exultation, 'For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help' (Ps. 22:24). By praying from this Psalm, Jesus was pointing ahead, indicating that His experience of God's absence wasn't the last word.

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, in my own suffering this day, I take up Your faith that, with God, suffering, loneliness, isolation, and chaos never have the last word. Suffering is suffer able because I know that the great story, and my story within it, does not end in pain but in joy, not in isolation but in communion.

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:

My dwelling place is now with you. 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.

Adapted from Revelation 21:3-4 (NIV UK)

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.

April 07 2023 (click for audio)

Good Friday

Today is Friday the 7th of April, also known as Good Friday, a day set aside in the Christian year for the Church around the world to mourn the brutal rejection and crucifixion of Jesus. God made His appeal to us, but we did not recognize Him. Surely this day can only be called 'good' because of the Sunday that follows it, making Friday not only a day of despair at the depths of our depravity, but also hope at the inexhaustible lengths to which God's redemption can reach.

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.

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, as I join You on Your journey to Calvary, give me eyes to perceive You in the shadows of my circumstance, faith to believe in Your perfect plan, and grace to receive Your mercies anew. Lord, carry me through the darkness of these difficult days to the life and light to come.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

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

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

Psalm 31:7-8 (NLT)

Throughout this week I have been meditating on Mark's account of Jesus' crucifixion. Today, I reach its climax, fixing my eyes on the Saviour who sacrificed everything for me.

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

Mark 15:37-41

Jesus' long night of trial and morning of torture concludes in a morning execution. It all began in Gethsemane when He was betrayed by a kiss. Judas may be the obvious villain, but he's certainly not the only villain. While Jesus prayed for the strength to surrender His will, Peter sharpened his sword,

John snoozed, and James' distracted mind wandered. Not a single one of them was able to remain present with the God who is ever-present to us.

Jesus was betrayed loudly by one, and betrayed quietly by many. And I have followed suit. Yet, it is for these very traitors, for me, He now goes on to die. Reckless in sacrificial love for all those reckless in self-love.

Ask

Jesus, thank You that, as I behold You on the cross this morning, I'm reminded that Your love always has and always will outpace my betrayal. That however dramatic or subtle my betrayal may be, it has been paid for in full.

Jesus, I name those in my life that don't know You, those who are yet to behold You on the cross, paying the debt for their sin. May Your love call out to them today, and may I make myself available as a vessel for Your pursuing love.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I listen afresh for the Spirit to speak to me through the word.

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

Mark 15:37-41

Standing in contrast to the betrayal and abandonment of his male disciples, a number of women stood by Jesus when the cost was highest. While it is the twelve who appear most frequently in the Gospels, Jesus' female disciples are every bit as present. Jesus was uncommonly empowering to women in His time and culture, breaking countless social conventions to hand men and women together the keys to His kingdom. As I recall the stories of these women over the previous three years, I wonder if perhaps they stand by Him because they'd experienced His love most deeply.

Yielding Prayer

Father, on this Good Friday, I ask You to show me my faults – the people I've wronged, sharp words I've spoken, selfish thoughts I've entertained – hidden and public, dramatic and subtle. Forgive me my sins and help me to forgive those who have and will sin against 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 1 John:

(As I) confess (my) sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive (me) and purify (me) from all unrighteousness.

Adapted from 1 John 1:9 (NIV UK)

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.

April 08 2023 (click for audio)

Holy Saturday

It's the 8th of April, Holy Saturday, the quiet, uneventful day wedged between Christ's crucifixion and 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.

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, as I join You on Your journey to Calvary, give me eyes to perceive You in the shadows of my circumstance, faith to believe in Your perfect plan, and grace to receive Your mercies anew. Lord, carry me through the darkness of these difficult days to the life and light to come.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to hope in God's liberation today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 27...

The one thing I ask of the LORD—

the thing I seek most—

is to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,

delighting in the LORD's perfections

and meditating in his Temple.

For he will conceal me there when troubles come;

he will hide me in his sanctuary.

He will place me out of reach on a high rock.

Then I will hold my head high

above my enemies who surround me.

At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy,

singing and praising the LORD with music.

Psalm 27:4-6 (NLT)

Today I'm reflecting on waiting – the waiting involved in the spiritual life, symbolized by this day in between death and resurrection.

And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of

the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.

Mark 15:42-47 (ESV UK)

They wrapped His body and laid Him to rest. The next morning was the Sabbath, and not just any Sabbath but Passover, when the temple would be packed tighter than any other day of the year, and as the priest stood to open the scroll, all the people sat gazing at the torn curtain, wondering what it meant, wondering if this might have anything to do with the crucified Jesus, who now lay wrapped in a linen shroud.

Holy Saturday is a day in between, a day to look and wonder... To look at the Father whose image is in all of creation. To look at the Son who would lay down His life. To look at the torn curtain and the release of the Spirit, and to wonder, to become curious, to be drawn back to awe by the God behind it all.

The curtain, a barrier dividing the people from God, was torn top to bottom. The symbolism was obvious: everyone is now welcome to stand in God's living presence.

Ask

Abba Father, open my eyes to behold Your glory today – in the beauty of creation, the quiet of reflection, and Your image in every person I interact with. Open my eyes to see and my imagination to wonder.

Lord, I pray now for all who are waiting today – refugees waiting for shelter and safety, foster children waiting for placement and family, mothers-to-be awaiting pregnancy or delivery, the unemployed awaiting wages, and the lost awaiting a Saviour. For all who are waiting, give courage, patience, and – in due time – bring their wait to an end.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to Mark's Gospel, I imaginatively engage with the passage, finding myself within it.

And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.

Mark 15:42-47 (ESV UK)

The Bible is filled with three-day stories... Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac, until an angel offered a ram ... on the third day.

Joseph's brothers were thrown in prison, and were released... on the third day.

Esther fasted and prayed against a genocide, and the king changed his mind ... on the third day.

The obvious question is, why a day in-between conflict and resolution? Why isn't every three-day story a two-day story?

Discipleship unavoidably involves waiting. Jesus is victorious! But we await the full and complete experience of His victory. So on Saturday, I become aware of all the redemption I'm still waiting for, all the redemption our world still awaits. And I wait ... but I wait with hope, sure that resurrection is always coming.

Yielding Prayer

Jesus, I look unflinchingly at the places of pain where resurrection victory has not come. And I await that resurrection with hope, taking up the prayer of David, 'I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living'

(Ps. 27:13, 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 Isaiah:

They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31 (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.

April 09 2023 (click for audio)

Easter Sunday

Today is Sunday the 9th of April, and it's Resurrection Sunday! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! This is a very special Sabbath, so today we'll be praying in a slightly different way.

Pause

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

Prayer of Approach

Jesus, as I join You on Your journey through Calvary into resurrection life, give me eyes to perceive You in the shadows of my circumstance, faith to believe in Your perfect plan, and grace to receive Your mercies anew. Lord, though darkness and difficulty may tarry, today I celebrate that life and light have truly come!

Rejoice and Reflect

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

Let all that I am praise the LORD;

with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name.

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.

He fills my life with good things.

My youth is renewed like the eagle's!

Psalm 103:1-5 (NLT)

Today is Easter Sunday, and this morning, I'm reflecting on the joy of resurrection – the victory of God that broke forth that morning and this morning.

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as

he told you.” And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Mark 16:1-8 (ESV UK)

Resurrection starts with a funeral. A few grieving women carrying the first century equivalent of flowers to a casket, weeping, mourning, grieving. But quickly, their grief is turned to joy at the great victory of a God whose love outlives death. The very place of heart-wrenching despair becomes the place of heart-rending joy!

And this is more than a single event. It is a biblical promise. The psalmist declares, ‘Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!’ (Ps. 126:5). Isaiah says Jesus has come ‘to give them a beautiful headress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit’ (Isa. 61:3). Jesus himself said, ‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted’ (Matt. 5:4).

When Jesus pushed back His own gravestone on resurrection morning, hope was born in the world – hope that this Jesus turns even the gravest despair into supernatural joy.

Ask

Resurrected Jesus, I willingly call to mind my own grief, the grief of a loved one, or the grief of a people group, and I boldly ask for hope – that somehow, against all the odds, You would turn weeping to dancing, mourning to joy.

Resurrected Jesus, I name those I know who have not encountered Your resurrection love, asking that, even now, You would appear and appeal to them in a way they can recognize and receive – that all who are lost may be found.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I listen personally, asking God to speak into my individual story and circumstances through His unchanging word.

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized

them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Mark 16:1-8 (ESV UK)

I can't help but notice the phrase, 'Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee.' The appearances of the resurrected Jesus tell us so much about the heart of God. Surely the most effective strategy for mass appeal would have been to appear to Caesar, at the Roman Colosseum, or back at Pilate's palace. But Jesus, it seems, wasn't so bothered about mass appeal.

Jesus spends 50 days, not proving Himself to the world, but strengthening the belief of the doubting, disillusioned, and disappointed. Peter is the one singled out. Peter, once so confident of his allegiance to Jesus, cowered in denial in the decisive moment. So Jesus seeks out Peter in his shame, not to condemn but to restore him. And Jesus seeks me out too, in the midst of my shame, not to condemn but to restore me.

Yielding Prayer

Risen Jesus, I invite You now to appeal to me in the place of my doubt, disillusionment, disappointment, guilt, and shame, to strengthen me where I'm weak and give me resurrection hope where my hope has died.

Yielding Promise

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

[I] have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where [my] forerunner, Jesus, has entered on [my] behalf.

Adapted from Hebrews 6:19-20 (NIV UK)

Sabbath blessing

May this special sabbath day bring resurrection life 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

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

April 10 2023 (click for audio)

I Have Seen the Lord: Mary Magdalene

Today is Monday the 10th of April, the day after Easter. Today and throughout this week we will be exploring extraordinary encounters with Jesus after His resurrection from the dead. These encounters strengthened the belief of those who were doubting 2000 years ago, and continue to give hope to us who've met the living Lord Jesus today.

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.

Prayer of Approach

Living Lord Jesus, as I draw near to You now in prayer, would You draw near to me? Surprise me again as You surprised so many others in those sacred days between Your resurrection and ascension to heaven.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in Christ's surprising, resurrected presence in my own story 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.

For you will not leave my soul among the dead
or allow your holy one to rot in the grave.

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)

Today I am reflecting on Christ's very first post-resurrection encounter: His extraordinarily moving appearance to Mary Magdalene in the garden on the dawn of the first day...

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her.

John 20:15-18 (ESV UK)

This is astoundingly beautiful. The very first person on earth to see Jesus after His resurrection does so through eyes blurred by tears. Perhaps it was the tears, or the early dawn twilight, or simply the fact

that Mary would have no psychological framework for finding Jesus alive after watching His brutal crucifixion, but when Mary first sees Jesus, she mistakes Him for a gardener.

I am again moved as I consider the tenderness of this moment. And I reflect on the way author Francis Spufford captures what Jesus might have said to Mary on that first resurrection morning:

‘Don’t be afraid. Far more can be mended than you know.’*

* Francis Spufford, *Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2012)

Ask

The third century rabbi Shemuel ben Nachmani said that: ‘We do not see things as they are. We see things as we are.’** In what ways might past disappointments or prior expectations be obscuring the new things Jesus is currently doing and saying in my life? Today, I ask for clarity and new expectancy where pain and grief may have blurred my eyes.

** ‘Seeing Things As They Are’, January 2016(<https://todaysrabbi.com/2016/01/27/seeing-things-as-they-are/>).

Thinking now of someone who has been hurt by religion, I ask that they - like Mary - might somehow meet the resurrected Lord Jesus this week in a way that is both supernatural and extraordinary, yet also very natural and ordinary.

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 ask for the Spirit of the living God to enliven my heart to hear these words as true today.

Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

John 20:15-18 (ESV UK)

I wonder why Jesus decided to appear first to Mary Magdalene rather than a member of His family or one of His eleven disciples?

Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest theologians of all time, described Mary Magdalene as apostle apostolorum, the apostle to the apostles. He did this because she was the first to carry the good news of Christ’s resurrection to those who would in turn carry it to the ends of the earth.

Mary may have been the first female apostle, as Aquinas acknowledges, but she certainly would not be the last. From Junia and Phoebe in the New Testament, to Jackie Pullinger and Heidi Baker today, women have been courageous (and contested) witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ right from the very start. And so today I pray for a female leader I know.

Yielding Prayer

Risen Lord Jesus, like Mary Magdalene I am amazed by Your power and Your presence, and confused by the way You wrap Yourself in ordinariness as You did in the garden. I simply surrender my life to You again, my Lord and my God.

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 Peter:

By my great mercy, I have given you new life, and you have been born again because of Jesus Christ raised from the dead. So raise your expectation! You have been given a priceless inheritance, pure and undefiled, unable to be touched by change or decay, and through your faith, I am protecting you by my power.

Adapted from 1 Peter 1:3-5 (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.

Find out more about Jackie Pullinger here:<https://www.ststephenssociety.com>

Find out more about Hedid Baker here:<https://www.irisglobal.org>

April 11 2023 (click for audio)

On The Emmaus Road

Today is Tuesday the 11th of April. In this week after Easter we are taking time to explore a few of the extraordinary encounters with Jesus in the days after His resurrection. Today's story takes us on the road with two of Jesus' followers to a moment of revelation in the presence of the risen Christ.

As usual, 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.

Prayer of Approach

Living Lord Jesus, as I draw near to You now in prayer, would You draw near to me? Surprise me again as You surprised so many others in those sacred days between Your resurrection and ascension to heaven.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's continual revelation of Himself today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 111...

How amazing are the deeds of the LORD!

All who delight in him should ponder them.

Everything he does reveals his glory and majesty.

His righteousness never fails.

Psalm 111:2-4 (NLT)

Today I join Jesus on the road to Emmaus. It's late in the day, the sun is setting, and I imagine the changing expressions upon the faces of those talking and walking together...

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb

early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Luke 24:13-27 (ESV UK)

What a breathtaking, life-changing encounter this is. I'd give anything to have taken part in that two-hour Lectio Divina, as Jesus slowly, methodically unpacked 'all the Scriptures... concerning himself'. There are two particular things that strike me as extraordinary here: firstly, that Jesus didn't just say 'Hi, it's me!' but took so much time to contextualize and even legitimize His own resurrection in the story of God. The ultimate miracle wasn't enough. Even after the resurrection, the Bible was still Jesus' ultimate source of authority. And secondly, I'm challenged by the way Jesus exposit Scripture 'concerning himself'. 'This book,' He seems to be saying, 'is all about Me'. Theologians call this the Christological hermeneutic. It simply means that we are supposed to read the Bible in the light of - through the lens of - the resurrected Christ. We understand the Old Testament, and the New Testament Epistles, in the light of the Gospels.

Ask

Do I tend to be more impressed by miracles than the Bible? Have I lost my delight in God's Word? Do I defer to its authority even when it flies in the face of my cultural preferences and expectations? I ask this same Jesus to ignite in me again the wonder of His word, making me hungry to 'read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest'.

There are 3,589 language groups still waiting for Scripture in their own tongue and 1 billion people still living in 'Bible poverty'.* I pray now for the vision behind the illuminations initiative uniting many of the biggest Bible translation agencies with the thrilling aim of finally making the Scriptures available in every language by 2033.

*<https://illuminations.bible/>

Pause and pray

Yield

And now, as I return to the Emmaus encounter, instead of reading the same passage again in the usual way, I rejoin the story a little later at its dramatic end...

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is towards evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on

the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”

Luke 24:28-32 (ESV UK)

Did not our hearts burn within us? I wonder if the couple on the Emmaus Road were remembering the words of Jeremiah when they chose this powerful phrase:

If I say, “I will not mention him,
or speak any more in his name,”
there is in my heart as it were a burning fire
shut up in my bones,
and I am weary with holding it in,
and I cannot.

(Jeremiah 20:9, ESV UK)

At the start of today’s Lectio, I said that the miracle of resurrection was not enough, they also needed the Bible. But here at the end of this story, we see that the Bible itself was not enough, they also needed a moment of supernatural revelation, and this takes place, significantly, when the disciples urged Jesus: ‘Stay with us. Share a meal. Share our lives.’ It is in this simple, relational moment of feasting, as the bread is blessed, broken, and given, that the living Lord Jesus is revealed and received.

Yielding Prayer

I yield today with Thomas Cranmer’s famous prayer from the Book of Common Prayer:

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

**<https://www.churchofengland.org/node/909/printable/print>

Yielding Promise

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

I will bring you through the fire
and make you pure.
I will refine you like silver
and purify you like gold.
You will call on my name,
and I will answer you.
I will say, ‘you are my people,’
and you will say, ‘The Lord is our God.’

Adapted from Zechariah 13:9 (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.

April 12 2023 (click for audio)

Doubting Thomas

Today is Wednesday the 12th of April. In the week after Easter and today we are continuing our series exploring life-changing encounters with Jesus in those extraordinary days after His resurrection from the dead.

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.

Prayer of Approach

Living Lord Jesus, as I draw near to You now in prayer, would You draw near to me? Surprise me again as You surprised so many others in those sacred days between Your resurrection and ascension to heaven.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

The Lord is my shepherd;

I have all that I need.

He lets me rest in green meadows;

he leads me beside peaceful streams.

He renews my strength.

He guides me along right paths,

bringing honor to his name.

Even when I walk

through the darkest valley,

I will not be afraid,

for you are close beside me.

Your rod and your staff

protect and comfort me.

Psalm 23:1-4 (NLT)

Today I am reflecting on that dramatic moment when Jesus first appeared to the disciple who has come to be known ever since as 'doubting Thomas'...

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 20:24-29 (ESV UK)

I'm struck by that first line in this famous passage: 'Thomas was not with them when Jesus came'. How must he have felt? Overlooked? Bypassed? Even rejected by Jesus? Might this perhaps help explain the defiance and prickliness of his response to the others? 'Unless... I place my hand into his side, I will never believe.' Maybe, like so many skeptics and cynics down the ages, Thomas' intellectual objections are, in fact, less rational than emotional. Sometimes I feel like Thomas when Jesus shows up for others, blesses others, and speaks to others in ways He hasn't yet done for me.

When Jesus singles Thomas out later, quoting his own gruesome words back at him, He's saying in effect, 'I heard you when you thought I didn't care. I was present when you thought I was absent.' And so, contrary to the depiction of this scene in works of art, Thomas never actually does touch Christ's wounds. This revelation is enough, and he cries out, "My Lord and my God!" Thomas believes not just because he now sees, but because he now knows that he was seen when he didn't see, and heard when he didn't hear, and known when he felt bypassed and forgotten.

Looking back on seasons of suffering in my own life, I can now see quite clearly how the Lord was present, not absent, in those moments of apparent abandonment. Perhaps when I feel forgotten I need to remember that His message to me is not so much, 'Hang on in there. I'll turn up eventually,' but rather, 'I see you when you can't see Me; I hear you when you can't hear Me; I believe in you way more than you believe in either of us!'

Ask

I talk to the Lord now about any ways in which I feel - or have ever felt - bypassed by His presence, or second-rate in my spiritual experience.

Thinking of someone who is antagonistic towards Christ, I ask the Lord to show me any emotional pain there may be at the root of their intellectual objections, and ask Him to bring healing to their hearts.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I imagine the flickering light of the oil lamps casting shadows across the expressions upon the faces in the room...

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."
John 20:24-29 (ESV UK)

Lord, you know I relate to Thomas. I share his doubts amidst exclamations of praise. But thank You for saying, 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' That's me! I claim it! I receive Your blessing now!

Yielding Prayer

Risen Lord Jesus, when You tell Thomas 'Do not disbelieve, but believe,' it stings a little. There's a gentle rebuke here amidst the affection in Your voice. And so today, I repent of jadedness and cynicism, making the choice to believe my beliefs more than my doubts, and to doubt my doubts more than my beliefs.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me makes the same promise to me that He first made to his friend Thomas some 2000 years ago, saying:

"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:20 (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.

April 13 2023 (click for audio)

Breakfast on the Beach

Today is Thursday the 13th of April, and this week we are exploring the extraordinary ways Jesus encounters His disciples in their ordinary lives during the week following His 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.

Prayer of Approach

Living Lord Jesus, as I draw near to You now in prayer, would You draw near to me? Surprise me again as You surprised so many others in those sacred days between Your resurrection and ascension to heaven.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's pursuing presence today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 139...

You know what I am going to say
even before I say it, LORD.

You go before me and follow me.

You place your hand of blessing on my head.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too great for me to understand!

Psalm 139:4-6 (NLT)

Today I am reflecting on a story of ordinary kindness where Jesus, risen from the dead and revealed as Saviour, prepares a simple breakfast for His disciples on the beach:

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

John 21:12-17 (ESV UK)

I imagine for a moment the joy of breakfast on the beach with Jesus. The hum of conversation, the crackling fire, and the way we all continually, surreptitiously, study the features of our friend. When eventually He gets to be alone with Peter, Jesus gets right to the heart of Peter's shame. Three denials are now confronted with these three agonizing questions: Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?

When I sin, my hope is always that Jesus hasn't noticed, and that, if He has, He will at least behave like an Englishman and brush the whole matter under the carpet. But instead He comes after me, with great tenderness and insistent love. His intention in doing this is never to condemn (John 8:11), but rather to redeem my future and restore our relationship.

Ask

Brené Brown, addressing this issue of shame, says that 'Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.'* What are the areas of shame in my life which I try to hide? Daring to hold them before the Lord now, I hear Him asking 'Do you love me?' How do I respond?

* Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (London: Penguin Life, 2015)

Thinking of a friend who seems crippled by the shame of some past failure, I bring them before the Lord in prayer.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage, I open my ears to hear the questions of Jesus to my heart today, asking that I would be yielded to God's will in my own story:

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

John 21:12-17 (ESV UK)

Whilst our contemporary 'cancel culture' attempts to ostracize, demonize, and silence those it considers sinful, this is categorically not the way of Jesus. Instead of canceling sin He confronts it to restore and redeem its perpetrators. And the result is that Peter, the great denier, becomes the great

preacher of Pentecost. The one who was too scared to confess Christ the night before his crucifixion, was himself crucified - upside down - for his defiant confession of Christ. And this is the very way of salvation; the hope of the world. For the rest of his life, every time Peter smelled fish cooking on an open fire, he must surely have remembered this moment and perhaps he would whisper these words again: 'Lord, you know that I love you.'

Yielding Prayer

Loving Lord Jesus, sometimes I confess my love for you too quickly. I brush my sin under the carpet and call it grace. Lead me this week into the shadows of my shame, illuminate the core motivations of my heart, restore and recommission me to carry your love to those like me who have denied you in thought, word or deed.

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:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1 (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.

April 14 2023 (click for audio)

Feast of William J. Seymour

Today is Friday the 14th of April, feast of the African American Pentecostal preacher, William J. Seymour. On feast days we pause from our usual rhythms to celebrate the stories and learn from the lives of heroes of faith, whose collective witness embodies our six practices at the heart of Lectio 365. These are: prayer and creativity, justice and hospitality, learning and mission. Today therefore we are thanking God for the extraordinary legacy of William J Seymour, a trailblazing, world-changing hero of prayer.

Pause

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

Prayer of Approach

Living Lord Jesus, as I draw near to You now in these moments, would You draw near to me? I wait and pray, like Your disciples in that upper room, saying: 'Come Holy Spirit'. Prepare my heart, provoke my soul, and prime my thinking for the power of another Pentecost.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

Let the whole world bless our God
and loudly sing his praises.

Our lives are in his hands,
and he keeps our feet from stumbling.

You have tested us, O God;
you have purified us like silver...
We went through fire and flood,
but you brought us to a place of great abundance.

Psalm 66:8-10,12 (NLT)

It was on this day in 1906 that a one-eyed, African American holiness preacher called William Joseph Seymour launched a 24-7 prayer room at 312, Azusa Street in an impoverished part of downtown Los Angeles. As this multiracial group grew, so did their spiritual hunger. They began praying night and day and eventually the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them with a power which would launch the worldwide Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Today, 117 years later, most of the world's 584 million Pentecostal and charismatic Christians trace their heritage directly or indirectly back to this day in 1906, to an unglamorous building on Azusa Street, and the unlikeliest of global statesmen, William J Seymour.

The second of eight children born to emancipated slaves in Centerville, Louisiana, William J Seymour was raised in extreme poverty. At the age of 25 he moved north to escape intense racial persecution, finding work in Indianapolis waiting at tables and laboring on farms. He also began attending Bible college and received mentorship from leading lights of the Holiness Movement, including Charles Parham who controversially advocated speaking in tongues.

In February 1906, Seymour moved to Los Angeles where he launched a prayer meeting which quickly outgrew his home. When they moved to Azusa Street, crowds as large as 1500 began gathering to seek the power of the Holy Spirit. One biographer recalls how, in this supercharged atmosphere, 'Brother Seymour generally sat behind two empty shoe boxes, one on top of the other. He usually kept his head inside the top one during the meeting, in prayer. There was no pride there ... In that old building, with its low rafters and bare floors...' *

*Frank Bartleman cited McGee, Gary. "William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival". Enrichment Journal. Archived from the original on May 19, 2007.

Ask

I am challenged by Seymour's single-minded hunger and thirst for more of the Holy Spirit. He wasn't trying to start a new movement, let alone a denomination, but his relentless desire for God was contagious. Jesus said that the Father loves to give the Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:13), and Paul said, 'be filled with the Holy Spirit' (Eph. 5:18). And so, opening my hands now, breathing slowly, I ask the Father to fill me afresh with his Holy Spirit.

At its core Pentecostalism is radically and controversially culturally diverse.* Those gathered at Azusa Street remembered how the Spirit had first been poured out at Pentecost to bless different cultures, and this is what they were experiencing for themselves as Africans, Latinos, Asians, and Europeans all received equally from the Lord. And so I pray now for God's Spirit to bless someone whose ethnic heritage is not my own.

* Newspapers published such titles as, 'All Night Meetings in Azusa Street Church, Negroes and Whites Give Themselves Over to Strange Outbursts of Zeal', 'Whites And Blacks Mix in a Religious Frenzy', and 'Crazed Girls in Arms of Black Men.'

Pause and pray

Yield

Of the events at Azusa Street, William J Seymour describes how: 'In a short time God began to manifest His power and soon the building could not contain the people. Now the meetings continue all day and into the night and the fire is kindling all over the city and surrounding towns. Proud, well-dressed preachers come in to "investigate". Soon their high looks are replaced with wonder, then conviction comes, and very often you will find them in a short time wallowing on the dirty floor, asking God to forgive them and make them as little children.'**

** William Seymour and the Apostolic Faith Mission, The Azusa Street Papers 1906-8 (Pentecostal Books, 2014) p. 27.

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I'm moved by this image of well-dressed preachers prostrate on the dirty floor asking for Your forgiveness, and of Seymour himself at prayer with his head in a shoe box. I repent now of my pride and choose to 'clothe myself with humility' for this coming day(1 Peter 5:5).

Yielding Promise

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

"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you... Receive the Holy Spirit."

John 20:21-22 (NIVUK)

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.

April 15 2023 (click for audio)

Corrie Ten Boom: Hero of Prayer

Today is Saturday the 15th of April. Yesterday we celebrated the life of William J. Seymour and today, unusually, we are going to pause our usual rhythm of prayer once again to celebrate another great hero of prayer, because it was on this day in 1892 that the Dutch Holocaust survivor, Corrie Ten Boom, was born, and it was also on this day in 1983 - her 91st birthday - that she died.

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.

Prayer of Approach

‘What wings are to a bird, and sails are to a ship,’ said Corrie Ten Boom, ‘so is prayer to the soul.’ And so today I spread my wings and hoist my sails. Come Holy Spirit. Take me today wherever You want me to go.

Rejoice and Reflect

I rejoice today in God’s protection, joining with the ancient praise of all God’s people in the Psalm that gave Corrie ten Boom’s autobiography its name, The Hiding Place:

You are my hiding place and my shield;

I hope in your word.

Depart from me, you evildoers,

that I may keep the commandments of my God.

Uphold me according to your promise, that I may live,

and let me not be put to shame in my hope!

Hold me up, that I may be safe

and have regard for your statutes continually!

Psalm 119:114-117 (ESV UK)

During the Second World War, the Ten Boom family built a hiding place in their home near Amsterdam, behind a false wall in Corrie’s bedroom. Here they bravely sheltered a steady stream of resistance fighters and Jews. Corrie also joined the Dutch resistance network, smuggling Jews to safety. It is estimated that she was personally responsible for saving some 800 lives.

But then, on 28th February 1944, the family was betrayed to the Gestapo. At 12:30 pm their house was raided. Corrie, along with her sister Betsie and their father Caspar, was arrested, but the six refugees hiding in their home at the time somehow survived. Tragically Caspar died ten days later, and the sisters ended up at Ravensbrück concentration camp in which 50,000 women died. It was hell on earth, but Corrie and Betsie launched a nightly prayer meeting using an old, tattered Bible they’d smuggled into the camp. She describes the scene powerfully:

Like waifs clustered around a blazing fire, we gathered about [that Bible], holding out our hearts to its warmth and light. The blacker the night around us grew, the brighter and truer and more beautiful burned the word of God... I would look about us as Betsie read, watching the light leap from face to face. More than conquerors... It was not a wish. It was a fact. We knew it, we experienced it minute by minute—poor, hated, hungry. We are more than conquerors. Not ‘we shall be.’ We are!*

* Corrie Ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2006), p. 27.

In one of their prayer meetings the sisters read Paul’s exhortation to ‘give thanks in every circumstance’ (1 Thess. 5:18) and wondered how on earth to give thanks for the fleas infesting their dormitory. But then they discovered that the fleas were the reason the guards had stopped checking their dormitory, allowing them to pray and worship in peace. And so, with a resilience that challenges me profoundly, these two indomitable sisters even began thanking God for the fleas in their beds in a concentration camp in the Second World War.

Tragically, Betsie died at Ravensbrück, but Corrie, who had been spared by what appears to have been a clerical error, spent the rest of her life traveling the world proclaiming her hard-won message about forgiveness and the prevailing power of prayer. In recognition of her courage she was knighted by the Queen of The Netherlands, and honored by Israel as ‘Righteous Among the Nations’ - a title given to those who risked their lives to help Jews during the war.

Ask

Can I name the fleas in my life right now? What annoyances - tiny niggles or serious afflictions - are draining my joy and depleting my capacity to ‘give thanks in every circumstance’ (1 Thess. 5:18)? I take a moment now to name these things before the Lord, asking Him to help me rejoice in spite of them.

Several years after the war, Corrie Ten Boom met one of her former guards. She’d been speaking at a church in Munich, Germany, when he approached.

‘How grateful I am for your message, Fräulein,’ he said. ‘To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!’ His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often ... the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side ... I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give Your forgiveness. As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand, a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.**

** Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2006), p. 247–8.

Thinking now of someone who has hurt me, I pray Corrie Ten Boom’s prayer: ‘Jesus, I cannot forgive them. But would You give me Your forgiveness for them?’

Pause and pray

Yield

Corrie Ten Boom's approach to prayer was straightforward, conversational, and trusting. It's easy to complicate things. Or to become so caught up in silent prayer that I stop asking God for miracles. And so I return today to the simplicity of Christ's teaching on prayer...

'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

'Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!'

Matthew 7:7-11 (NIVUK)

Yielding prayer

God, I am deeply moved by the resilience, the forgiveness, and the obedience of Corrie ten Boom. In all that I face today, its joy and its pain, help me to trust in the truth of Corrie's great maxim that 'nothing is too great for Your power, and nothing is too small for Your love.'

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, no matter what challenges I'm currently facing...

'In all these things I am more than a conqueror through him who loved me. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus my Lord.'

Adapted from Romans 8:37-39 (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.

April 16 2023 (click for audio)

Easter Week: Sabbath Prayer

Today is Sunday the 16th of April, a day of rest, one week after Easter, when we replace our usual patterns of prayer with a shorter, simpler format. This past week I have been exploring wonderful encounters with Jesus, risen from the dead. On Monday it was Mary Magdalene mistaking Jesus for a gardener. On Tuesday it was the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, mistaking Him for an ignorant fellow traveler. Wednesday was the Apostle Thomas wrestling with doubt. On Thursday the Apostle Peter was wrestling with shame on the beach. On Friday and yesterday, we switched to contemporary disciples, William J Seymour and Corrie Ten Boom, nobodies who became somebodies because they met Jesus Christ. Reflecting on each of these encounters, I am struck by the grace of God, reaching out to those who were slow, sinful, unbelieving, and unimpressive. I am also struck by how gentle and unassuming He was.

I too can be embarrassingly slow, downright stupid, plagued by doubt, and riddled with shame. And yet Jesus Christ has chosen to make Himself real to me too. In what ways has meeting Jesus changed the trajectory of my life? How might I be different if I wasn't a Christian?

It is a very great joy to encounter the resurrected Jesus, even when it comes as a gentle, undramatic realization. And so I join now with the Apostle Peter, many years after his breakfast on the beach, celebrating the wonder of Christ's resurrection...

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see.

So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.

You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls.

1 Peter 1:3-9 (NLT)

Pause and pray

The reason we celebrate Sabbath on a Sunday, and not a Saturday like the Jewish people, is because this is the day on which Jesus rose from the grave. On Sunday everything begins again because it was on a Sunday that Jesus inaugurated a whole new world. In many ways Sunday is the start of eternity. And this is why, for Christians, it is a day of resting and receiving.

And so I take a thousand-year-old prayer from Saint Symeon, and ask the Lord to awaken my heart afresh today to His resurrecting work in my world:

Come, O true light!

Come, O eternal life!

Come, O true and fervent expectation of all those who will be saved!

Come, O rising of those who lie down!

Come, O resurrection of the dead!

Come, O eternal joy!

Come, you who have separated me from everything and made me solitary in this world!

Come, O my breath and life!

Come, O consolation of my humble soul!

Come, O my joy, my glory, and my endless delight!

I thank you that you have become one spirit with me.*

* Saint Symeon, the New Theologian (949-1022

CE), <https://iconandlight.wordpress.com/2017/06/03/the-holy-spirit-fills-everything-he-touches-with-unspeakable-joy-st-seraphim-of-sarov/>

Pause and pray

And now, fortified in faith, I dedicate the coming week to the glory of my resurrected Lord and Saviour, asking that others may encounter him too:

Thank You, Father, for pursuing me with grace.

Help me this week to do the same for those who don't know You.

Thank You, Jesus, for saving me from myself.

Help me this week to die to myself and put the needs of others first.

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for filling my life.

Help me this week to convey the hope and happiness of Your presence to those who don't believe.

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-stored.

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.

April 17 2023 (click for audio)

The Gold Standard

Today is Monday the 17th of April, and we are embarking on a new series here on Lectio 365: Ancient Paths, Ancient Practices. Together, we are looking to the Old Testament to shape our understanding of the six practices at the heart of Lectio 365; these are prayer and mission, justice and hospitality, creativity and learning. This week, we are exploring how God's justice was understood, championed, and lived out by Abraham and his descendants.

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.

Prayer of Approach

God of love, remove the calluses from my heart so that I may be moved. Reveal the prejudices that cloud my vision so that I can see. Shake the apathy from my soul so that I can pray, speak, and work for Your justice today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's character today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 33...

Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.
For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.
He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.

Psalm 33:3-5 (ESV UK)

Today I am reflecting on what God's rule and reign look like...

The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours;
the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.
The north and the south, you have created them;
Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name.
You have a mighty arm;
strong is your hand, high your right hand.
Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.

Psalm 89:11-14 (ESV UK)

The words righteousness and justice are often paired in the Old Testament to express something important about God's character and kingdom. The Hebrew word for righteousness describes a fixed

or right standard, something that can be measured against. God's righteousness is the standard set by Him for the way the world should be. It's His vision of 'life to the full' for everyone and everything under His rule (John 10:10).

Ask

God, I prefer to set my own standards for 'righteousness', it's more comfortable to define right and wrong in my own, culturally acceptable ways. Today, however, I dare to ask an uncomfortable question... Do any of my standards for what's 'right' differ from Yours?

The Psalmist connects God's justice and righteousness with His steadfast love. God, have I recently sought justice and righteousness in a particularly un-loving 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.

The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours;
the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.

The north and the south, you have created them;
Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name.

You have a mighty arm;
strong is your hand, high your right hand.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.

Psalm 89:11-14 (ESV UK)

The Hebrew word for justice encompasses more than my modern ideas of judges, juries, courts, and criminals. It's an imperative to intervene in all unjust situations, taking the side of the wronged and doing whatever it takes for this broken world, and every beaten down person within it, 'to be restored to' God's righteous standard of free and full life.*

*Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking The Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), p. 366.

Yielding Prayer

God, I want to join in with Your justice and righteousness. Whether that's in my home, my workplace, my community, or my nation; give me the courage to intervene, to stand with the abused, the oppressed and the wronged, no matter what it might cost me.

Yielding Promise

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

You are blessed when you hunger and thirst for righteousness, because you will be filled.

Adapted from Matthew 5:6 (NIV UK)

Closing Prayer

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

being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,

being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost,

proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.

Amen.

April 18 2023 (click for audio)

Enoch Sontonga: Hero of Creativity

Today is Tuesday the 18th of April, feast of the poet and composer, Enoch Mankai Sontonga, who dies on this day in 1905. On Feast Days we pause from praying the Bible to celebrate the stories and learn from the lives of heroes of faith, whose collective witness embodies our six practices at the heart of Lectio 365. These are: prayer and creativity, justice and hospitality, learning and mission. Today therefore we are thanking God for the extraordinary example of Enoch Sontonga, an almost accidental hero of creativity.

Pause

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

Prayer of Approach

Creator God, who formed us from dust, breathe in me again. Give me a fresh imagination to perceive new possibilities today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's welcome today, joining gladly with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 87...

I will count Egypt and Babylon among those who know me—
also Philistia and Tyre, and even distant Ethiopia.

They have all become citizens of Jerusalem!

Regarding Jerusalem it will be said,

"Everyone enjoys the rights of citizenship there."

And the Most High will personally bless this city.

When the Lord registers the nations, he will say,

"They have all become citizens of Jerusalem."

Psalm 87:4-6 (NLT)

Born in 1873, in what was then the Eastern Cape Colony, Enoch Sontonga later became choirmaster of a Methodist Mission School near Johannesburg in the Transvaal. In 1897, the 24-year-old teacher wrote a hymn in his native Xhosa language for the students to sing as a school anthem. Its first line was, Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika – 'God Bless Africa'. As far as he knew, when he died suddenly in 1905, aged just 32, this was just one of many songs written by an unknown poet, destined to be soon forgotten.

God bless Africa;

May her strength rise high up;

Hear our prayers and bless us.

Descend, O Spirit,

Descend, O Holy Spirit.*

*Translated from the Xhosa, <https://www.antiwarsongs.org/canzone.php?id=996&lang=en>

But the song was not forgotten. By 1925 it had been adopted as the anthem of the African National Congress, becoming a symbol of the anti-apartheid movement. With additional stanzas by the poet Samuel Mqhayi, Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica became a pan-African liberation song, and versions of it were adopted, at least for a time, as the national anthems of Zambia, Tanzania, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. The first verse of Enoch Sontonga's Xhosa hymn remains embedded in South Africa's national anthem today.**

**See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enoch_Sontonga and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nkosi_Sikelel%27_iAfrika.

Ask

Do I underestimate what God might create out of the ordinary things I do?

Lord, may I do or make at least something in my lifetime which will outlive me, and continue to have an impact on coming generations.

Lord, I pray for someone I know – an artist, an author, a poet, a songwriter – that You would give longevity to their words. May they speak God's freedom long into the future.

Pause and pray

Yield

Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica has become almost the anthem of a continent. Anthropologist David Coplan argues that it has 'come to symbolize more than any other piece of expressive culture the struggle for African unity and liberation.'*** So, today I use these words to pray for the continent of Africa...

God bless Africa;

May her strength rise high up;

Hear our prayers and bless us.

Descend, O Spirit,

Descend, O Holy Spirit.

***<https://journals.openedition.org/etudesafricaines/4631>

Yielding Prayer

Come Holy Spirit, descend on Africa and descend on me. I yield to Your transforming flame. Fill me afresh so that I may be a source of grace and blessing in my world today.

Yielding Promise

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

The LORD bless you
and keep you;

the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26 (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.

April 19 2023 (click for audio)

The Outcry

Today is Wednesday the 19th of April, and we are continuing our series Ancient Paths, Ancient Practices. This week, we are allowing the Old Testament to shape our understanding and outworking of God's justice.

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 justice and righteousness in our lives.

Pause

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

Prayer of Approach

God of love, remove the calluses from my heart so that I may be moved. Reveal the prejudices that cloud my vision so that I can see. Shake the apathy from my soul so that I can pray, speak, and work for Your justice today.

Rejoice and Reflect

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

Your unfailing love, O LORD, is as vast as the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.

Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your justice like the ocean depths.

You care for people and animals alike, O LORD.

How precious is your unfailing love, O God!

Psalm 36:5-7a (NLT)

Today I am reflecting on an encounter between God and Abraham. The Lord and His companions are on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah when Abraham, unaware of whom he's encountered, persuades them to rest with him...

Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off. The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him." And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now and see whether they have done

entirely as the outcry, which has come to Me indicates; and if not, I will know.”

Genesis 18:16-21 (NASB)

There is some beautiful and revealing word play in the original Hebrew of this passage. The Lord wants a people who will live out His שֹׁדָאָה, His righteousness, but when He surveys Sodom and Gomorrah all He hears is a שֹׁאָאָה, an outcry of pain from those being oppressed. At the beginning of this well-known story about God’s judgment, I discover that God is motivated not by anger, but by compassion. He cannot ignore a cry for help. He will intervene to end the suffering.

Ask

Lord, is there someone in my community who is crying out for help but I’m not hearing them? Has my heart been hardened toward their situation, or maybe I’m simply not paying attention?

Lord, I pray for them now: intervene! Work for justice! Is there a way I can take their side, or champion their cause 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.

Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off. The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.” And the LORD said, “The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now and see whether they have done entirely as the outcry, which has come to Me indicates; and if not, I will know.”

Genesis 18:16-21 (NASB)

This incredible glimpse into God’s thoughts and priorities draws a direct line between living God’s way and ‘doing justice and righteousness’. God wants His people involved in His work. He wants Abraham, and me, to be attentive to the cry of others, to investigate injustice instead of looking the other way, and to act on behalf of the wronged, whoever and wherever they may be.

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I want to follow Your way. I want to fight injustice and inequity but if I’m honest I often feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the problems I see. Show me one simple thing I can begin with today.

Yielding Promise

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

I work for justice and righteousness for all who are oppressed.

Adapted from Psalm 103:6 (NIV UK)

Closing Prayer

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

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

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

Amen.

April 20 2023 (click for audio)

Reap What You Sow

Today is Thursday the 20th of April. This week, we are meditating on the Old Testament and exploring how we can put God's justice and righteousness into practice in our everyday lives.

Pause

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

Prayer of Approach

God of love, remove the calluses from my heart so that I may be moved. Reveal the prejudices that cloud my vision so that I can see. Shake the apathy from my soul so that I can pray, speak, and work for Your justice today.

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 97...

The LORD is king!

Let the earth rejoice!

Let the farthest coastlands be glad.

Dark clouds surround him.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

Psalm 97:1-2 (NLT)

Today I am reflecting on a very practical portion of the law that God gave to the people of Israel...

"You shall not pervert the justice due to the [foreigner] or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge, but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.

"When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the [foreigner], the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the [foreigner], the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterwards. It shall be for the [foreigner], the fatherless, and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this."
Deuteronomy 24:17-22 (ESVUK)

God's law is peppered with practical instructions that, if followed, would shape Israel into a just and fair society. God commands the generous treatment of foreigners, orphans and widows (in other words the most vulnerable), and if the Israelites are at all hesitant about helping them, God reminds His people that they were once at the bottom of the pile. Simply put, having experienced God's

justice, Israel was commanded to extend justice to others.*

*See Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), p. 262.

Ask

When have I experienced God working on my behalf? Thank You, God, for the generosity, liberation and help You have extended to me.

There are over 27 million people living as refugees in other nations today, half of them are less than 18 years old.** God's command to generously provide for foreigners challenges me. I pray for my political leaders, particularly the foreign policy decision-makers.

**<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html>

Lord, shape us into a just, fair, hospitable, and generous society that welcomes the displaced and gives them a home.

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.

"You shall not pervert the justice due to the [foreigner] or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge, but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.

"When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the [foreigner], the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the [foreigner], the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterwards. It shall be for the [foreigner], the fatherless, and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this." Deuteronomy 24:17-22 (ESVUK)

I am personally challenged by the generosity that God expects His people to practice. Not keeping everything I earn or produce for myself requires trust, particularly when my financial future seems uncertain. Giving generously requires me to trust that God will provide for my needs, while He involves me in meeting the needs of others.

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I want to put my money where my mouth is. I surrender my bank balance and all my resources, however large or small they may be. To whom can I give generously today?

Yielding Promise

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

If you sow sparingly, you will reap sparingly, if you sow generously, you will reap generously.

Adapted from 2 Corinthians 9:6 (ESVUK)

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.

April 21 2023 (click for audio)

Let Justice Roll

Today is Friday the 21st of April and, this week, we are meditating on the Old Testament, exploring how we can put God's justice and righteousness into practice in our everyday lives.

Pause

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

Prayer of Approach

God of love, remove the calluses from my heart so that I may be moved. Reveal the prejudices that cloud my vision so that I can see. Shake the apathy from my soul so that I can pray, speak, and work for Your justice today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice in God's holiness today, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 99...

Mighty King, lover of justice,
you have established fairness.

You have acted with justice
and righteousness throughout Israel.

Exalt the LORD our God!

Bow low before his feet, for he is holy!

Psalm 99:4-5 (NLT)

Today I am reflecting on a call to repentance, delivered by the prophet Amos, to the people of Israel...

"I hate, I despise your feasts,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,

I will not accept them;
and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,
I will not look upon them.

Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.

But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Amos 5:21-24 (ESV UK)

These are strong words!

What had Israel done to upset God?

Earlier in the chapter, Amos laid out the charges against them: they were bullying, 'right-living people, taking bribes right and left and kicking the poor when [they were] down' (Amos 5:12, MSG). And yet, the people of Israel thought that God would ignore their behavior, accept their worship, and forgive their sins, even when they showed no indication that they would change their ways.

Ask

Lord God, I want my entire life, not just the few hours I spend in church on Sunday, to be pleasing to You. I reflect on the way I've treated people, and how I've used my money and my influence this week. Have any of my choices undermined my worship of You?

I pray for the justice system that serves my community. God, give wisdom to judges and juries. May nothing, not money, nor power, or social status, obscure the truth or stand in the way of Justice

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...

"I hate, I despise your feasts,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,
I will not look upon them.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Amos 5:21-24 (ESV UK)

What word or phrase jumped out at me from this passage?

I am struck by the image of justice rolling down like water. Where does my nation need God's justice and righteousness to wash away any stain of corruption or exploitation?

Yielding Prayer

Lord, I pray on behalf of my nation. We, like Israel, are not innocent. Forgive us for any corruption and greed. Wash away our sin. May Your kingdom come, and Your will be done, here as it is in heaven.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says in 2 Chronicles:

'If you will humble yourself and pray and seek my face and turn from your wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive your sin and will heal your land.'

Adapted from 2 Chronicles 7:14 (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.

April 22 2023 (click for audio)

My Complaint

Today is Saturday the 22nd of April and, this week, we are meditating on the Old Testament, exploring how we can put into practice God's justice and righteousness in our everyday lives.

Pause

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

Prayer of Approach

God of love, remove the calluses from my heart so that I may be moved. Reveal the prejudices that cloud my vision so that I can see. Shake the apathy from my soul so that I can pray, speak, and work for Your justice today.

Rejoice and Reflect

I choose to rejoice today in all the good things God has done for me, 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.

He fills my life with good things.
My youth is renewed like the eagle's!

The LORD gives righteousness
and justice to all who are treated unfairly.

Psalm 103:2-6 (NLT)

The northern kingdom of Israel has been conquered. God has sent the prophet Jeremiah to warn the southern kingdom of Judah that they are about to face a similar fate. After delivering God's word to the people, Jeremiah has a complaint for God...

You are always righteous, LORD,
when I bring a case before you.

Yet I would speak with you about your justice:
why does the way of the wicked prosper?
Why do all the faithless live at ease?

You have planted them, and they have taken root;
they grow and bear fruit.

You are always on their lips

but far from their hearts.

Jeremiah 12:1-2 (NIV UK)

This is an audacious prayer! Jeremiah is confident in who God is, and the kind of just and fair standard God wants everyone to live by. So, with confidence and courage, he boldly calls for God to stop evil in its tracks.

Ask

Have I ever complained this courageously to God? Do I feel I have permission to follow Jeremiah's example and speak this frankly? Is there anything I've harbored in my heart that I need to bring to Him now?

I think of someone I know who is being treated unfairly right now. Perhaps at work, at school, or even in their home.

God of justice, I call on You to intervene on their behalf.

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...

You are always righteous, LORD,
when I bring a case before you.

Yet I would speak with you about your justice:

why does the way of the wicked prosper?

Why do all the faithless live at ease?

You have planted them, and they have taken root;
they grow and bear fruit.

You are always on their lips
but far from their hearts.

Jeremiah 12:1-2 (NIV UK)

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

I'm struck by the final lines. It's possible to say all the right things about God, whilst turning my heart away from Him. Where is my heart pointing today?

Yielding Prayer

Lord God, I trust You. I know You hate injustice and hypocrisy even more than I do. So I ask You to start with me. I turn my heart towards You and speak with honesty and courage today.

Yielding Promise

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

I long to be gracious to you;

I will rise up to show you compassion.

For I am the God of justice.

Blessed are you when you wait for Me!

Adapted from Isaiah 30:18 (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.

April 23 2023 (click for audio)

A Sabbath Prayer for Justice

Today is Sunday the 23rd of April, a day of rest on which we interrupt our usual P.R.A.Y. pattern with a shorter, simpler time of prayer.

This week I have been thinking about God's justice and righteousness. It's easy to feel relentlessly responsible for tackling all the world's insurmountable problems. But, today, I pause to remind myself that it's not all down to me, and to receive again God's grace and mercy.

So, as I enter this time of prayer, the Lord says to me...

'Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.'

Isaiah 55:1 (NIV UK)

Pause and pray

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Matthew 11:28-30 (MSG)

Pause and pray

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

*Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), p.6

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

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

Father, I take a moment now to pray for those who really don't have enough. I bring to Your attention a particular person I know, or a crisis happening somewhere in the world, where Your justice and mercy are desperately needed.

Pause and pray

Sabbath Blessing

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

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

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

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

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

**Pete Greig, Sabbath Blessing, petegreig.info