

LENT

DEVOTIONAL

2026

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



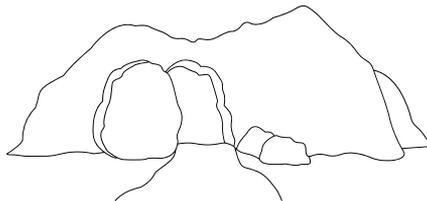
We encourage you to
read and reflect on the
words written by
members of your First
Church family during
this 2026 Lent season.

Lent is a time to pause, to take a breath, and reflect. We see Jesus intentionally stepping away to be with his Father as he readied himself for Holy Week. Let's do the same – pause with intention. Let us find a place of stillness that helps us to reflect and grow in our faith.

Devotional writers were asked to consider:

- What scriptures have given you pause in your life?
- Is there a scripture that caused you to reflect on a characteristic of God?
- When you need to take a breath and slow down, what scripture do you turn towards?
- Has a scripture helped you draw closer to God or deeper into faith?

In this Lent Devotional, you will find devotional reflections from those in our church community, guidance on integrating spiritual practices, and suggestions for pause and reflection.



Lent 2026

Begins on Ash Wednesday (February 18th) and concludes on Easter Sunday (April 5th)

Dates and Information

February 18th - Ash Wednesday Service

Shiremanstown UMC | 7:00 P.M.

April 2nd - Passion Play (Maundy Thursday)

6:30 P.M. | Includes Communion

April 3rd - Good Friday Prayer Walk

11:00 A.M. | Meet at FUMC

April 5th - Easter Sunrise Service

Mechanicsburg Cemetery | 6:40 A.M.

Includes Communion

Breakfast in Fellowship Hall to follow

April 5th - Easter Services

8:30 & 11:00 A.M.

Information about Lent studies, small groups, and Sunday school classes can be found on Church Center or in the Main Lobby at the Registration Table.



Spiritual Practice:

Visio Divina

Visio Divina, or “sacred seeing,” is a prayer practice where we slowly reflect on an image and listen for what God might be revealing through it. Instead of analyzing, we notice what draws our attention and allow the Spirit to speak through what we see.

Our God is a creative God and he is not limited to the mediums in which He can speak. Art is a beautiful way the Spirit can direct, correct, or teach us. As with many of the spiritual disciplines, they are tools and habits that can provide us a new way of focusing and listening when we give time and space to God. The same is true of Visio Divina – we allow space for focus and for God to speak as we notice and study an image.

PRACTICE:



Take a slow breath. Look at the image quietly for a minute before answering anything.

1. What do I notice?

(What stands out? Where do my eyes rest?)

2. What do I feel?

(What emotion rises in me?)

3. What might God be showing me?

(Is there a word, phrase, or invitation? If God was speaking through this image, what might he say?)

4. How do I want to respond?

(A prayer, a release, a step forward? Is there a prayer that rises up in you?)

The Pause That Told the Truth

By George Canonizado

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

- Psalm 46:10

For a long time, I believed I was less than everyone else. Not because anyone told me so, but because my own thoughts did. Wherever I went, I carried that story with me—quietly comparing myself to others and measuring my worth by what I thought I lacked. The truth is, most of that weight was self-provoked, built from years of listening to the wrong voice.

I struggled everywhere in life, not just in one place or season. I stayed busy to avoid the pause, because when things slowed down, the doubts rushed in. Stillness made room for questions I didn't want to answer and feelings I didn't know how to name.

Then life forced a pause I didn't choose. Everything I used to quiet the noise stopped working. In that stillness, I expected judgment, but instead, I found grace. God met me there and showed me something I had missed all along, I was already loved. I wasn't “less than.” I never had been. I was surrounded by people who loved me for exactly who I am, even when I couldn't see it myself.

Now, the pause has become something new. It's an invitation—not just to rest, but to notice others who feel the same weight I once carried. If my story can help someone feel less alone, if I can offer a listening ear, a shoulder, or even a simple hug, then this pause has purpose. Lent reminds us that God doesn't waste stillness.

PRAYER:

God, help me pause and trust the truth You speak over me. Use what You've healed in me to bring hope and comfort to others.

Amen.

Do You Need a Timeout?

By Al Robinson

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. - Acts 9: 1-9

Luke writes that Saul was breathing murderous threats against people who believed in Jesus. He even got the High Priest to issue arrest warrants for Christians in Damascus. On his way to execute the warrants, Saul heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (vs. 5). Blinded, Saul was led to the city and spent three days praying. He got a time-out, a pause, to reflect on what he had been doing. I wonder if he got a good talking to by God, too. After that timeout, Saul, who became Paul, reminds us that Jesus died to save our sins in his writings that we continue to read today.



Chuck Colson got a timeout, too. As a new Christian, Colson voluntarily pled guilty to obstruction of justice in 1974 and served seven months in prison for his part in the Watergate scandal. During his timeout, Colson learned how other incarcerated people and their families were treated. In 1976, Colson founded Prison Fellowship, an organization that equips the Church to serve currently and formerly incarcerated people and their families, and to advocate for justice and human dignity both inside and outside prison.

We need to take a daily timeout to reflect on our relationship with God and those with whom we interact. Taking some time out of each day assures that we are working cooperatively with God, being the love of Jesus Christ to our family, friends, neighbors and co-workers. Having a daily timeout can help you and me stay on track and not need the dramatic timeouts like Saul and Chuck Colson experienced.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank you for Saul and Chuck Colson, who were forced into timeouts to know you so they could help others know you, too. Help me to take a time out to reflect on my relationship with You and with everyone I meet.

Amen.



Feb 21st
Feb 22nd

Weekend

Selah

The word "Selah" appears frequently in the Psalms, often interpreted as a musical or meditative pause to "pause and calmly think about" or reflect on what has just been read or sung.

Let each weekend of this Lenten devotional book be a "selah." A meditative pause to reflect on what you previously read that week and to lift up your voice to the Lord in song during Sunday morning worship.

**"Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him; God
is a refuge for us.
Selah."**

-Psalm 62:8

Spiritual Practice: Silence

Silence is the intentional practice of quieting our words and distractions to simply be with God. In stillness, we learn that God's presence does not depend on our productivity or performance.

Silence in a world filled with noise is hard.

Don't try to tackle too much silence at once. Start small and learn to adapt to the silence. Begin with a minute, then two, then three, and so on. Try creating space for silence in routine and familiar spaces. Add some silence to your morning commute, add space for silence when you brush your teeth or eat a meal.

Silence is not necessarily about the quiet itself, but about what you encounter in the quiet – what you notice, how you feel, and what God speaks into those moments.

PRACTICE

- Find a place/time for silence
- Position your body in a comfortable and attentive position
- Close your eyes
- Take a few deep breaths
- Listen: What do you hear? (car traffic, a dog, etc...)
- Listen again: What do you hear beyond the sounds you just identified? (a motor's hum, a clock's tick, etc...)

Try this exercise to train your ear to listen in the silence to what is not normally heard.

Do While You Can, Rest When You Must

By John Bowen

“Happy are those who persevere and attain the thousand three hundred thirty-five days. But you, go your way, and rest; you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days.” - Daniel 12:12-13

The title of this devotion has been my mantra for the past few years. Since being diagnosed with lymphoma and completing my treatments, I have come to appreciate the sentiment of doing all you can while you are able and taking advantage of each day that God has so graciously given. But, regardless of how much energy I have on any particular day to accomplish a never-ending list of chores, the need to rest will eventually present itself (sometimes when I'm least suspecting it in the middle of a conversation or when reading a book after a busy day).

I chose this passage from Daniel because it mentions rest as a necessary step before you can rise for your reward. It made me think of my daughters' ongoing pursuits of the perfect sourdough loaf. Both girls research, compare notes, and practice their baking craft with a passion that warms Janice's and my heart. And one thing they have definitely learned is how the mixing and kneading and stretching of the dough, while important, pales in comparison to the waiting for both starter and dough to take their time resting and rising. Without the pause in the process, there is no reward of the desired texture and taste for which true sourdough enthusiasts strive.

PRAYER:

Dear God, help me persevere and work with whatever ability I have been given to serve others, while acknowledging the need for and making space for the right amount of rest to allow me to recognize how that time contributes to the ultimate reward.

Amen.

Weekly Pause

pause /'pɑ:z/ noun

to cause (someone) to stop and think about something carefully or to have doubts about something

Consider this definition of “pause” as you pause today.

Have you ever had something give you pause? An unexplained situation or an unexpected response that caused you to take a moment and reconsider the situation? The men in John 8 had brought before Jesus a woman caught in adultery and were with, stones in their hands, ready to inflict great pain upon her. Yet, Jesus actions and questions gave them pause and they reconsidered their plans as they dropped their stones to the ground and walked away.

Can you recall a time that a pause allowed you to have a shift in perspective/understanding?

How can reflective pauses be healthy in our interactions with others?

Is Jesus asking you to pause and reconsider anything?

Create in Me

By Christopher Couch

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. - Psalm 51:10-11

To me, this is a message of renewal. I do something wrong. I screw up. I either pretend that I am right or it was worth it, or I feel miserable. And when I get smart, I know I can go to God, confessing all to one who already knows but likes to hear from us, anyway. And unless we go so far away we lose the spirit of God in us, like Saul, we should know—I should know—that when praying, when talking, when being open, God hears and is so willing to love and to forgive. Not without the need for correction, but the presence of God stays with me. And you. And us.

PRAYER:

Dear God, help us to repent when we are wrong, when we have sinned. Keep our spirits right with you and your loving, saving presence in our lives.

Amen.



The Power of Pause

By Janice Bowen

Bending down again, he wrote on the ground. Those who heard him went away, one by one, beginning with the elders. Finally, only Jesus and the woman were left in the middle of the crowd.

-John 8:8-9

To pause may be an unwelcome interruption. I'm thinking of red lights and train crossings, bad weather cancellations, getting sick at Christmas, or even running low on funds to pursue a dream or life project. Negative and unwanted, these pauses are often experienced as happening to us beyond our control or best planning and intentions. Other situations of pause may be welcomed, even treasured: a 2-hour delay on a snowy morning, a phone call from far-away family, a vacation, a nap, an unexpected run-in with a long-time friend, the birth of a baby, a beckoning book or movie.

How did Jesus pause? Did he welcome the pauses we note in scripture or resent them? When I think about this, I'd say the days of Jesus' ministry were perpetually punctuated by pauses.....pausing to go off on his own to pray, pausing to address the need or hurt brought before him in the stifling crowds, pausing to teach about God by sharing lessons and parables, pausing to be quiet and 'draw in the sand' to give the angry crowd a chance to think and consider their actions.



Jesus certainly seemed to prioritize pausing to listen to people and to talk with God His Father. Do I always take the time I should to listen to people and to talk with God? I can honestly say, sometimes, but not nearly enough. How can I hear God's promptings and guidance if I never pause to be quiet and still? How can I pray for deepest concerns without pausing? I can't.

To pause is to experience God. To pause is to discover wonder and meaning. To pause is to be able to give a friend the opportunity to share thoughts and feelings, to process and better understand. To pause is to give space to experience the Holy Spirit's presence.

One of my favorite ways to pause is to duck into a coffee shop. Here, I feel permission to slowly enjoy a hot drink. I feel able to listen to a friend without the distractions of my home and agenda (even if the coffee shop is buzzing with table conversations). I feel able to think and focus more specifically and creatively. Maybe it's the caffeine, but I think it's the invitation to pause and step away from the other demands of life, even if just for an hour or two. Can you imagine meeting Jesus for coffee? I think he would welcome the pause and be thrilled to have you choosing to spend time with Him. Cracked Pot, anyone? Tell me when and I'll meet you there!

PRAYER:

Lord, thank you for showing me the value of pausing to remain connected to you. You are the vine, I am your branch. Help me to remember: "The one who claims to remain in him ought to live in the same way as he lived." (1 John 2:6).

Amen.

Feb 28th
March 1st

Weekend

Selah

**"Blessed be the Lord, who daily
bears us up;
God is our salvation.
Selah."**

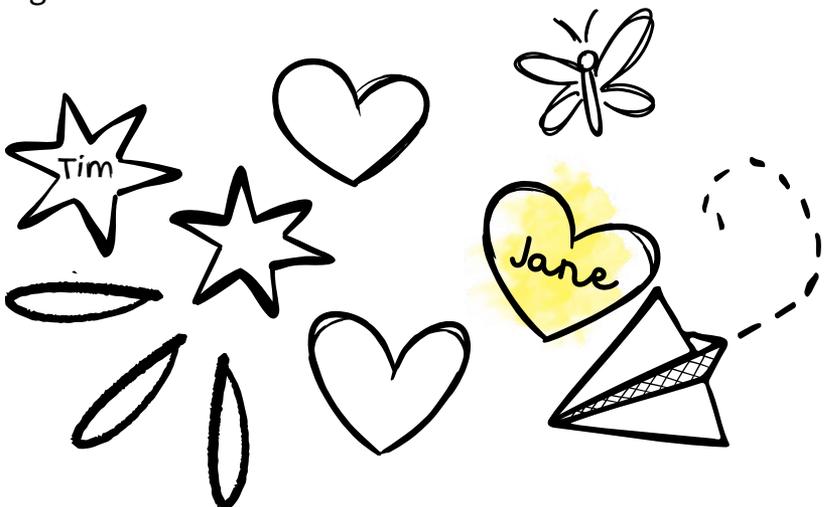
- Psalm 68:19

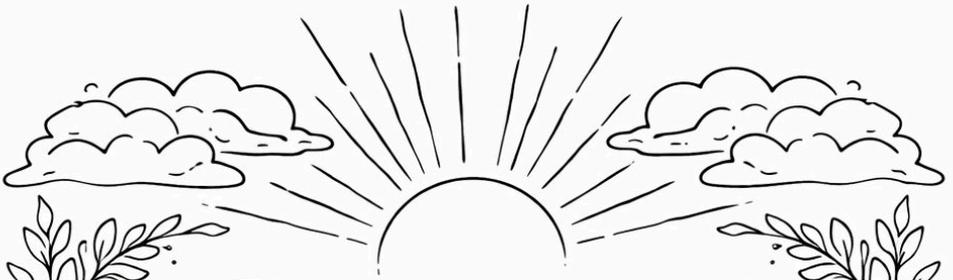
Spiritual Practice: Praying in Color

Praying in Color combines simple doodling with written prayer to help focus a wandering mind. As you draw shapes and write names or concerns inside them, prayer becomes visual, creative, and deeply attentive.

Praying in color can be whatever you need it to be! The main goal of this practice is to help our minds from wandering and give our eyes and thoughts a centering point for our prayers. Search online for “Adult Scripture Coloring Sheets” and print a sheet to color while you meditate on the verse or as you offer up your thoughts and prayers to God.

Another option is to use a blank page and let the Spirit lead you in your prayers. Doodle some shapes and then start writing into those shapes the names of people you are praying for. Continue to color, circle, or add to the person’s name. Allow what you are doing to prompt your prayer for that person. Example: “God, as I fill Jane’s circle in with yellow, I pray that you bring brightness to her life. Like sunshine, radiate into all the areas of her life that she is finding difficult and dark.”





Be still

AND KNOW THAT

I am God

PSALM 46:10

Human Doings

By Pam Murdoch

Be Still and Know that I am God

-Psalm 46:10

There is a Celtic Cross that hangs beside my back door that has the words “Be still” on it. I see it multiple times a day. Each time it reminds me to pause. To take a breath, to slow down and know that there are times when pausing is the best thing I can do for my mind, my body and my soul.

In our world, we, as human beings, are always on the go. We find ourselves overworked, overcommitted and overstimulated to a point of exhaustion. In fact, maybe we should be called “human doings” instead of human beings. What if we slowed down? What if we took a deep breath and let ourselves be still?

Being still and slowing one’s mind and body takes practice. But once it’s mastered, there is a peace and contentment that goes along with it. God wants us to be still. To know Him. To know that when we pause, we can enjoy so many of His wonderful creations. When was the last time you enjoyed feeling the warmth of the sun shining through a window on a cold day? Or held a hot cup of fresh coffee in your hands and smelled the aroma? Or sat on a beach and did nothing but listen to the ocean?

When I take the time to pause, I can’t help but wonder about the awesomeness of God. In the little things I see Him. In the big things I feel Him. I know that ultimately, He is in control. As I continue on this journey called life, the Celtic Cross beside my door will continue to remind me to pause. To be still. To slow down and know that God is with me wherever I go.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the encouragement you give us to be still. That it is ok to pause in our busy lives. To know that you are God. And to know that you are with us, always. Amen

Weekly Pause

paused / verb

to stop doing something for a short time before doing it again

Consider this definition of “pause” as you pause today.

I recently attended a spelling bee (as a spectator) and the participants are reminded to listen to the word, repeat the word, and then to pause before beginning to spell. Forgetting to pause can be detrimental. The pause allows for the administrator of the bee to clarify if they said the word correctly, thus assuring they heard the correct pronunciation. The action of pausing is often a necessary and important safety measure in our lives: She paused before she crossed the street. He paused before he made the first cut in the wood. Pausing allows us the chance to avoid mistakes, not get hurt, or redirect our plans (or spelling).

In the Old Testament, we see Abraham engaging in his relationship with God concerning the safety of those living in Sodom and Gomorrah. God paused and considered the request, and in turn, Lot’s life was spared.

When has you pausing been a buffer that provided safety?

For many, these cautionary pauses are learned and become habits in our lives. What ways of pausing might God be asking you to integrate into your life as a habit to keep you safe or increase your wisdom?

March 5th

God's Whisper

By Krissy Marshall

“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek him.” - Hebrews 11:6

I have been a stay-at-home mom for 8 years. With my youngest starting kindergarten this year, I have been thinking and planning about what I might want to do for a job. I am a social worker, a profession in which finding the right fit is challenging.

Over the last year, I went on several interviews. I was offered a position that was an excellent fit based on my experience, and it actually paid pretty well! However, I didn't want the job. Although I thought I would be good at it, the truth was, the job didn't excite me.

I felt bad for turning down the job for several reasons. A voice in my head was repeating, “You're selfish. You're selfish. You're selfish.” But then I turned and saw a book called “Whisper” by Mark Batterson sitting on my dresser. And I heard God say to me, “How dare you think that was the only door I could open for you. Just because you closed it, that doesn't mean there isn't another one for you.”

I immediately felt relief. I knew that I needed to put deeper trust in God, the God of the Universe! My God surely won't stop working in me over one passed-up job opportunity. He's so much bigger than that! All it took was a moment to pause and think as I remembered what I had read in a book, and I was reminded that my God is bigger than I could ever realize and working in ways I may never see. He lets us choose the paths we take. He's right there with us on each one – helping us shine His light and bring His kingdom to earth.

PRAYER:

Lord God, please help us to stop and see You. Stop our wandering thoughts. Stop our negativity. Stop our limits. Help us to see You and trust in You. Amen.

March 6th

The Train I Didn't Catch

By Katie Dang

*"The heart of man plans his way,
but the Lord establishes his steps."*

- Proverbs 16:9

On the morning of July 7, 2005, I stood on a London Underground platform, ready to begin an ordinary workday at my internship. The train arrived late. When it finally pulled in, it was not taking passengers, and no explanation was given. Mildly inconvenienced, I left the station and began walking to the office. Only later did I learn what had happened: coordinated bombings across the London transport system. Had I arrived earlier—had my routine unfolded as planned—I might have been on one of the trains that was attacked. The small decision to sleep a little longer, prompted by a late night at work, placed me out of harm's way.

Moments like this confront us with a sobering truth: much of what we call "control" is an illusion. We plan, we schedule, and we rush—but God governs outcomes in ways we often cannot see. Scripture reminds us, "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). What felt like a minor inconvenience was, in hindsight, a quiet act of protection.

We live in a culture that prizes urgency. Pausing can feel irresponsible or inefficient. Yet the Bible consistently reframes waiting as an act of faith. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10) is not an invitation to disengage from responsibility, but a call to release the false belief that everything depends on us. Stillness creates space for humility and trust.



Experiences of narrowly missing danger unsettle our confidence in our own competence. We like to believe that safety and success flow from good judgment and careful planning. We wake up on time, follow routines, and assume that if we do our part, the outcome will follow. Yet that morning in London exposed how fragile that assumption can be. The difference between safety and catastrophe was not foresight or discipline—it was timing, circumstance, and grace beyond my awareness.

PRAYER:

Dear God: dismantle my tendency to confuse planning with control. Remind me that while I may choose my intentions, I cannot command the consequences. Father, you alone see the full scope of what lies ahead—only you know what you are preventing, permitting, or preparing us for. Revealing all in your timing. I pray for courage to accept that reality, so that pauses and interruptions take on new meaning. Let them become invitations to trust, and reminders that my deepest security rests not in my ability to manage life, but in your faithful care over every unseen step. In your Son's name I pray. Amen.



March 7th

March 8th

Weekend

Selah

**"But you, O Lord, are a shield
about me, my glory, and
the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to
the Lord, and he answered
me from his holy hill.
Selah".**

- Psalm 3:3-4

Spiritual Practice: Examen

The Examen is a gentle, daily prayer of reflection that helps us notice where God was present in our day. We review moments with gratitude and honesty, asking where we felt close to God and where we may have resisted His invitation.

We've all had those days that didn't go as we thought, and we crash into our bed, exhausted, thinking, "I'll try again tomorrow." God's mercies are new every morning, and so yes, each day is a fresh start and a new beginning. Yet, think about how a new day might unfold if we allowed space for God to examine our day with us. The Examen (developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola), allows us to recognize God's presence, learn to see him in all things and seek direction.

The Examen is a gentle prayer practice that helps us notice where God has been present in our ordinary moments. It is not about self-criticism. It is about awareness, gratitude, and grace.

PRACTICE:

1. Arrive

Pause and become aware of God's nearness.

Take two or three slow breaths.

Whisper: "Lord, you are here."

- What does my body feel like right now?
- What is the tone of my heart as this day ends?

2. Give Thanks

Review the day with gratitude.

Slowly walk back through your day — from morning until now.

- What am I thankful for?
- Where did I experience joy, beauty, kindness, or connection?
- What small gift did I almost overlook?

Thank God specifically for these moments.

3. Notice

Pay attention to your emotions and responses.

Without judgment, gently reflect:

- When did I feel most alive today?
- When did I feel drained, frustrated, anxious, or distant?
- Where did I respond with love?
- Where did I react from fear, pride, or impatience?

Ask: “Lord, what are you showing me?”

4. Receive Grace

Bring your burdens honestly before God.

If something weighs on you, name it.

- Is there something I need to confess?
- Is there a hurt I need to release?
- Is there a burden I need to entrust to God?

Receive forgiveness. Receive mercy. Let go.

5. Look Ahead

Entrust tomorrow to God.

- What do I need for tomorrow?
- Where might I need courage, patience, or wisdom?

Pray simply:

“Lead me, Lord.”

Closing Prayer

God of this day,

Thank you for your presence in what was beautiful
and in what was difficult.

I release what I cannot control and receive your mercy again.

Give me rest, and prepare my heart for tomorrow.

Amen.

Need a simpler format?

Pause. Look back. Notice. Receive.

Pause, Reflect, Repent, Give Grace

By Darryl Small

“Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” - John 8:7

There are not many passages that cause me to “pause” as with John 8:7. Many times, I am quick to judge or quick to speak out of line. I’m learning with God’s love, that I must “pause”, reflect, ask him forgiveness and provide grace. Jesus’ words stop the accusers in their tracks. The people who brought the woman were ready to condemn her, but Jesus forced them to examine themselves first. He exposes a truth we often ignore: It’s easy to see someone else’s failure, but harder to face our own. Jesus does not deny the seriousness of sin, nor does He excuse the woman’s actions. Instead, He redirects the moment from punishment to reflection. His response models a justice that begins with humility and a mercy that doesn’t ignore truth.

This verse invites us to pause before we judge, criticize, or label someone based on their mistakes. We all carry our own flaws, weaknesses, and hidden battles. Remembering that can soften our hearts toward others. John 8:7 is ultimately an invitation to look inward. Before we “pick up a stone”—with our words, attitudes, or assumptions—Jesus asks us to consider our own need for forgiveness. It reminds us that grace received should become grace given and not to judge someone because they sin differently than YOU!

PRAYER:

Dear God, please help me not to be quick to act or respond, but to allow you to soften my heart. Help me to understand that I do not know what someone else is going through or their hidden battles. Help me to give grace when grace should be given. In Jesus name I pray.

Amen.

Weekly Pause

pause /'pa:z/ noun

a mark (such as a period or comma) used in writing or printing to indicate or correspond to a temporary stop of voice

Consider this definition of “pause” as you pause today.

I have a shirt that says:

Let's eat kids!

Let's eat, kids!

Punctuation saves lives.

Knowing that there is a pause in that phrase changes the outcome of the sentence. In writing, we see it reflected with a comma but when hearing the written word, we need the speaker to pause their voice, sometimes taking a breath, to convey the meaning.

Not taking the pause can change the intention of the phrase.

Do you have space to breathe in your day?

Do you allow for the moments of pause that allow for brief moments of rest?

How easy is it for you to allow God to place “commas” into your day? What makes it hard/easy?

Is God nudging you to add any pauses into your day? If so, when and where would these “commas” be placed?

A Double Pause

By Al Robinson

In the morning, while it was still dark, he (Jesus) got up and went to a deserted place and there he prayed. - Mark 1:35

Jesus was tired. He had taught in the synagogue, cast out a demon, healed Peter's mother-in-law, had dinner with his first four disciples, and after sundown, healed some more sick people and cast out more demons. (Mark 1: 21-32) This was on a sabbath day, no less, a day which was supposed to be for rest. So Jesus did what anyone else would do after a big day: he took a pause; he went to sleep.

However, Jesus took a second pause. He got up before sunup and took a pause in prayer with God. We don't know what his conversation with God was completely about. Perhaps it was a review of the previous day or maybe a discussion about the four disciples he just called. God must have given Jesus some direction because when Simon Peter and his companions found him he said, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came to do." (Mark 1:39)

You and I need both pauses. Prayer so that we can reflect with God upon the day just past and learn how to do better and to hear from God about his will for the day ahead of us. We also need sleep and rest so that God can give us the energy to do it.

PRAYER:

Dear God, help me to pause each day to pray so that you can direct my work for your will, and help me to pause and rest each day so that you can give me the strength to do it.

Amen.

March 13th

Holding Onto Hope

By Patti Vogl

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." - John 10:10

As young adults, many of us look forward to finding our life partner, marriage, finding success in our work, raising a family, etc. While we were growing up, this is the path that many of us came to learn and follow. A life that included achievement, pursuing your dreams, happiness, independence but also family togetherness, generations helping one another, having the privilege of watching our children grow up to be healthy, happy responsible adults, the blessings of grandchildren. After all, this is the cycle of life, right? But what happens when life goes off course? When there is an unexpected and tragic death? When there is a divorce that shatters your dreams? When you lose your job and also your life savings? When life does not turn out at all the way you thought it would be through no fault of your own?

Even for people of strong faith, the loss of the life that we imagined is yet another loss, especially if we've already suffered the loss of a loved one thorough death, divorce, or estrangement.

Lent is a time that reminds us that Jesus' earthly life was anything but smooth or comfortable. He was the son of God and yet he had no home, no assurance of his next meal, and no hope of safety on his journey. Still, He said that He has come to give us an abundant life—here on earth and in heaven.

This promise is one to cling to when life isn't what we thought it would be, because both in tragedy and in moments when God surprises us with new or unexpected blessings, He is there. And He loves us, He comforts us, He provides for us, and He has a plan for us.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, help us to be grateful for the people around us, for the strength that you have given us to persevere through difficulties with You by our side, and for hope that comes through You for an abundant life.

March 14th

March 15th

Weekend

Selah

**"You are my hiding place;
You shall preserve me from trouble;
You shall surround me with songs of
deliverance.
Selah."**

- Psalm 32:7

Spiritual Practice: Finger Labyrinth

A finger labyrinth is a simple tracing path used as a prayer tool. As you slowly trace the path with your finger, you symbolically journey toward God's presence, releasing distractions and receiving peace.

Movement can ground us. It's a common tool used in psychology that can calm our bodies, reframe thinking, and alter physiological responses. Sometimes, stillness in prayer is distracting – we need movement – something to ground us to the moment and focus our thinking.

A prayer labyrinth is not a maze. There are no tricks or dead ends. It is a single path with three spiritual movements: Releasing, Receiving, and Returning.

PRACTICE

As you trace your finger (or draw a line) along the path, follow these prompts:

Inward path → Release

Center → Receive

Outward path → Return with intention

Release: *This is the journey of letting go.*

- Release distractions.
- Release expectations.
- Release burdens, fears, and striving.
- Release the need to control outcomes.

You might pray:

"Lord, I give this to you."

Receive: *The center represents stillness and communion.*

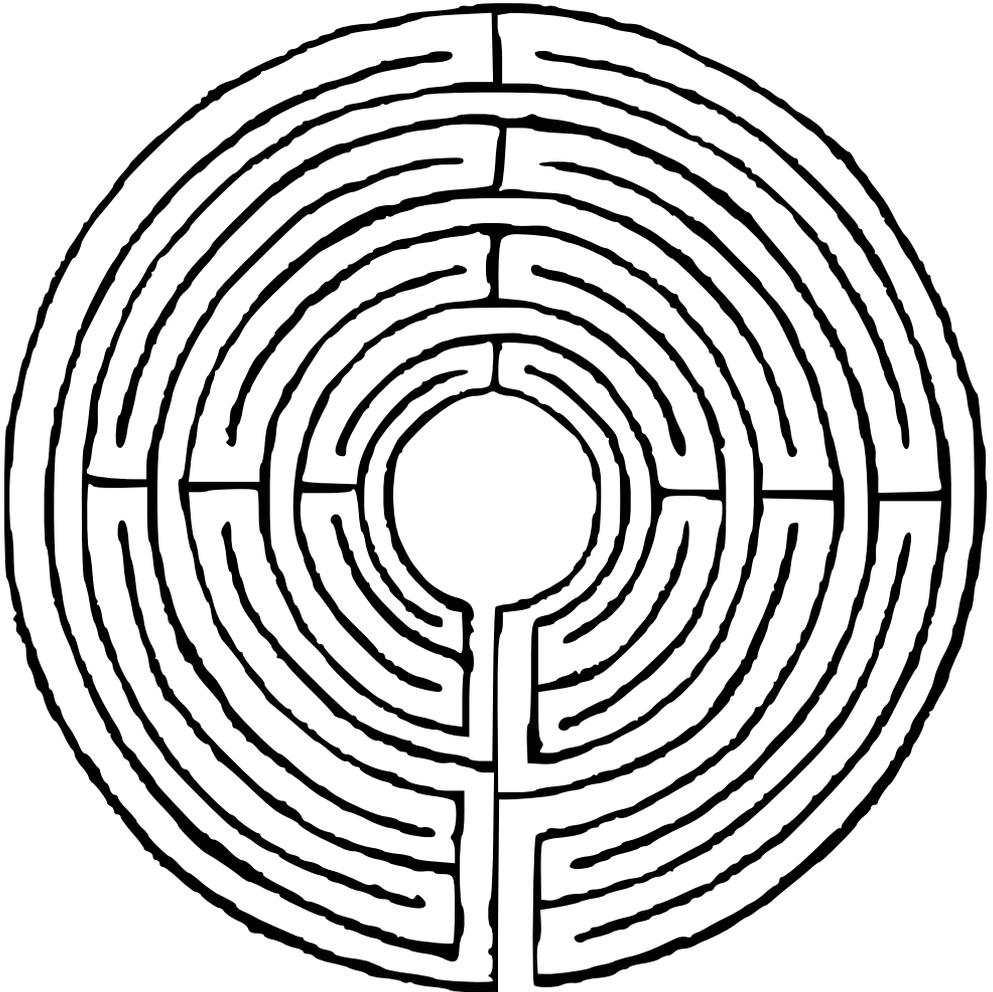
- Receive God's love.
- Receive clarity.
- Receive grace.
- Receive identity as a beloved child.

You might pray:
"Speak, Lord. I am here."

Return: *This is the journey of integration.*

- What are you carrying back?
- What invitation did you sense?
- What needs to change?
- What needs to remain surrendered?

You might pray:
"Help me walk this out."



March 17th

Directing Your Path

By Pastor Mira Hewlett

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge God, and God will make straight your paths." - Proverbs 3:5-6

At the Women's Retreat this year we did an indoor labyrinth walk. To help me slow down I intentionally walked heel to toe, heel to toe inward to the center. Pause. Outward to the end. Heel to toe, heel to toe. As I did Proverbs 3:5-6 came to mind. Over the years I always thought, oh a few more years and I will know the path, understand the plan he set and be solid in my way. And yet 20 years into ministry and 45+ years into life I continue to feel uncertain on my path, don't always see the potholes before I trip or bounce, or walk with uncertainty into new adventures, challenges and ways.

Almost weekly I have conversations with someone on a new or unfamiliar path - health that's declining or uncertainty on health complications, shift in expectations at home or work or abilities, unexpected bills, or mental health challenges in a season of depression. To others I am quick to say, God is with you on this path wherever it may be going, but it's often harder to hear your own sermons. Yet this truth rings true for me and all of us who thought by now we would or should have this thing called life figured out - God WILL direct our paths - one foot at a time, one conversation at a time, one prayer at a time.

BENEDICTION:

May you and I find rest, comfort, and peace knowing that we are called not to lean on our own understanding, but on God's understanding. Today, may we all lean into God's paths, God's ways, and know God's peace along this journey called life.

Amen.

Weekly Pause

pause /'pɑ:z/ noun

a temporary stop : a period of time in which something is stopped before it is started again

Consider this definition of “pause” as you pause today.

There was a long pause for the Israelites when the prophets of God ceased; a divine silence until the arrival of Jesus. Did they realize it was a pause? How many began to wonder if it was a complete stop? There were 400 years between the last recorded word of Malachi and the arrival of Jesus. Or when Jesus was in the Tomb – did they recognize the pause or was it seen as a stop?

What actions can you take to assure there are no “years of silence” in your relationship with God?

Is there anything in your life that you understood as a stop, but might have been a pause?

Is there anything you have paused that God is nudging you towards a full stop?

March 19th

Guilty for the Pause

By Lisa Aronson

*Therefore, the Lord God,
the holy one of Israel, says:
In return and rest you will be saved;
quietness and trust will be your strength—
but you refused. - Isaiah 30:15 CEB*

Last year, Joshua, my son, received a spider plant from an outdoor summer camp he attended. He potted it himself and so we made sure to give it the sunlight and water it needed to thrive. And thrive it did! If you know anything about spider plants, they produce shoots that have baby spider plants that you can trim off to propagate. I was excited to have some additional plants because I love plants and gardening. But this was one fertile spider plant because at one point, I trimmed off nearly 20+ spiderettes. My windowsill couldn't handle anymore little jars of baby spider plants sitting in water, growing new roots. Much to my shame, I even tossed a handful in the trash because my new job of tending to spider plants was too much!

Then, it stopped: no more shoots, no more baby plants to propagate. Oh no! Eek! Did I kill it by depleting it of all its shoots and wishing for no more? I just needed a pause --- not only did I have no more window sills, I had no more jars --- it needed to stop. I felt guilty.

In desperation, before needing to tell Joshua I killed his plant, I googled if Spider Plants take a break from producing shoots. Here is what I learned:

“Yes, spider plants do take breaks from producing shoots (runners) and babies (spiderettes). While they are known for being prolific, their reproduction cycle is not continuous year-round and is heavily influenced by environmental conditions, plant age, and stress.”

We weren't made to be continuously in motion either. Sometimes our circumstances, environment, season of life, or yes, even age and stress, cause us to need a break – a break from extending ourselves, like the shoots, to be available for others. And if you're anything like me, sometimes that need for a break causes me to feel guilty. Guilty that I can't be available, can't be the friend I wish to be, can't use my gifts in the ways I know I am capable. But we were only made for so much. We only have so much windowsill space in our lives, and sometimes the pause is not only necessary, it's required.

Maybe this Lent, like me, you need to assess how much you have left to give of yourself. Take this time to pause and be rejuvenated by the story and life of Christ. Sit quietly, not while you are extending yourself, but in the stillness of the pause, and let yourself be filled and made ready to extend yourself again when it's time.

PRAYER:

God, help me to learn from you and about you, in the things I see in my daily life – like a spider plant. Guide me to see that pauses in extending myself to others is both okay and necessary. You created us not just to reach out to others, but to sit in the stillness and give ourselves fully to you. Meet me in the pause and strengthen me because of it.



Take Time to Press Pause

By Katie Knorr

“Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.”

- 1 Peter 5:7 NLT

Teaching children has taught me many things: find the extraordinary in the ordinary, friendship comes in many shapes (sharing a kind word or your goldfish crackers), and there are many times we need to take a pause. I was recently sent a video about children making a pause button that helps remind us that when we feel big emotions, we need to remember to pause. Whether it's a moment of pure excitement that causes children to run around the room, or frustration making them want to destroy the block tower of a fellow classmate – pausing gives us a moment to find the peace we are in need of.

Pause is needed as much for adults as it is needed for children: When in need of rest when life seems overwhelming. When experiencing disappointment because the one thing you've been praying for has not yet seem to come. When exhausted from shoveling snow that never seems to go away (and that is coming from someone who loves the snow).

How wonderful it is that we have a God who is there to love us and be with us in these moments of pause. God never says “I'm too busy” or “this is too inconvenient of a time”. God is there to be with us whether that time of pause comes in the middle of your morning coffee, the middle of a restless night, or the middle of standstill traffic. We are to come to prayer (or have a moment of pause) whenever we feel the moment is right. May you find a moment or two to press the pause button and find God in whatever that moment looks like.

PRAYER:

Loving and patient God, You know that life is difficult and that we may try to push through the challenges. Help us to press the pause button and turn to you to find peace. In your name we pray, Amen.

March 21st

March 22nd

Weekend

Selah

**"All the earth bows down to you;
they sing praise to you, they sing the
praises of your name.
Selah".**

- Psalm 66:4

Spiritual Practice: Breath Prayer

A breath prayer is a short phrase prayed in rhythm with your breathing. By quietly repeating it with each inhale and exhale, the prayer settles into both body and soul, anchoring you in God's presence.

Breath Prayers might be the simplest of any spiritual practice. It can go with you anywhere, it can be created on the spot and for the moment, and you are never without the necessary tool: your breath. It is a simple way to pause and pray.

PRACTICE:

Step 1: Choose Your Prayer

Pick a short phrase that fits your heart today. Keep it 2–4 words.

Examples: “Be near, God,” “Jesus, my peace,” “Come, Holy Spirit.”

Step 2: Align Words with Breath

- Inhale: silently say the first part of your prayer.
- Exhale: silently say the second part.

Example: Inhale: “Come,” Exhale: “Holy Spirit.”

Step 3: Repeat

- Continue for 1–5 minutes (or longer if you like).
- Focus on your breathing and the prayer words.
- If your mind wanders, gently return to the rhythm.

Step 4: Close

- Take a final deep breath.
- Offer a simple “Thank you, Lord” or “Amen.”

Tips for Practice

- Use it anywhere: walking, waiting, or sitting quietly.
- Keep it simple. Your words can change daily.
- This practice is about presence, not perfection

March 24th

Pause & Pray Before Moving Forward

By Flossie Ryder

*"I can do all things through Christ
who strengthens me"*
- Philippians 4:13

As I think of Christ's journey to the Cross, I try to focus on His knowing where He was headed long before any of us could imagine. Then, considering our own lives, taking that direction and NOT finding a reason to pause and change direction!

In my position as Sounds of Worship Choir Director, I begin my preparation (my "journey") in the summer of each year. At that time, I go into my "prayer room", where a sample of most of the choir music is stored. I quietly open the Worship and Music Planner. I then begin to spend time in prayer asking God to help me find the appropriate music to honor and celebrate each Sunday for Him, *and* music our precious choir can interpret and sing appropriately. All the time, I am "pausing" and praying again before I move forward.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, help us to learn to pause and pray
before we move forward – today and every day!

Amen.

Weekly Pause

pausing/ verb
to linger for a time

Consider this definition of “pause” as you pause today.

It can be tough to encounter someone who has a very tight schedule. While they might be able to squeeze seeing you into a moment of their day, you know they won't be lingering because they have another place to be/person to see. Pausing allows us to linger. It allows us to offer unexpected time to a person. Its the reaction we long for when we encounter beauty or awe-inspiring realities. We don't want to keep moving; we just want to stay put a little longer. Jesus wants us to pause with him. He always wants us to linger, to have the space and desire in our day to not just move on from him but to be with him always. Jesus is calling us to pause when he tells us to “remain” in him (John 15).

Is your schedule designed in a way that allow the action of pausing?

How does it make you feel to be the recipient of someone who can't linger if you need extra time with them?

What can you do to linger longer with God and not put a time stamp on your encounter/time with Him?

March 26th

The Tomb and Divine Pause

By Sarah Pugh

Read John 19-20

Some of the most memorable pauses and rests in music are filled with important intentions for a larger plan. The rests and spaces between the notes and phrases that each musical composer incorporates command an important role in the piece as a whole-- they make all the difference telling the story, and certainly does not mean the piece is over.

For example, one of Dolly Parton's most popular songs, "I Will Always Love You" famously performed by Whitney Houston, has one of the most dramatic pauses towards the end of the song. After Whitney sings of her wishes for joy, happiness, "and above all this, [I] wish for you love...", there is an obscurely-placed long pause right before the illustrious and powerful key change, where Whitney belts the chorus one last time. This pause creates an immense anticipation for something even stronger and gratifies the song as a whole.

Similarly, we turn to one of the greatest moments of pause in scripture: Jesus's death and resurrection.

Good Friday is loud. It's painful, agonizing, and a haunting reminder that Jesus was fully human. Sunday is triumphant. It's a jubilant celebration that Jesus arose with OUR freedom in hand. Our lives can begin, because of Jesus.

But between those two contrasting days is Saturday. The day of pause. It's unbearably quiet, undefined, hard to understand, and scripture barely narrates it. Saturday exposes what we believe about God as part of our faith—in every silence, God is always at work. Behind the rolled stone, the silence, and the Saturday pause, God was crafting the greatest miracle in history.

Each season of pause may not always have the instructions, the clarity of what's next, or even the grandiose resurrection afterwards, like Whitney belting out that final chorus. And yet, how beautiful it is not to know what's at work in the pauses, but trust in a God who does. How magnificent it is to see God crafting these pauses with important intention for a larger plan.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the pauses You intentionally provide in our lives. In those moments of silence, may we learn that this is not the end of the story, but the breath before something greater that You are writing. We place our waiting hearts into Your faithful hands. In Jesus' Name we pray.

Amen.



The Yoke

By Lisa Aronson

“Come to me, all who are weary and
burdened, and I will give you rest.”

- Matthew 11:28 -30

When teaching on this passage to the youth group the other week, the Spirit helped me understand something I had previously missed about this passage. I usually turn to this scripture when I need a break. The worship song that says “lean back into the loving arms of a beautiful savior” gives me an image of what I imagine going to God for this rest would look like. A break – curling up, maybe even closing my eyes, and just taking a nice pause from anything I am currently doing. Restful time with Jesus ::::sigh:::: just what I need.

It’s the verse that follows that makes me think I might have the wrong image. Verses 29 and 30 say, *“Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear and the burden I give you is light.”*

The image I had would suggest the next verse should be, *“Take my pillow,”* not *“Take my yoke.”* A yoke is not a tool for rest; it is one for work. In the Bible, a yoke is a wooden beam, placed on the necks of two animals (usually oxen) that allows them to pull heavy loads by moving in step together.

Jesus offers us rest and in the same breath, tells us that we get that rest by yoking ourselves to Him. Yes, sometimes the rest we need is physical, but in this case, it's entirely different. The rest is from our self-sufficiency, from the "I can do it on my own" mentality. The yoke handed to us, and the rest offered to us, is to be alongside Jesus in the steps we take. His presence alongside us, helping to shoulder the load and guiding us forward, is the rest we are offered. Rest from carrying it alone, rest from deciding on our own, rest from the isolation we often create in our faith. The rest we are offered doesn't ask us to stop, but instead move with Jesus.

I have to think this was a lesson shared by Jesus for his disciples and us, but also spoken for himself. A reminder to himself that to move towards the cross and to bear the weight of the suffering to come, his yoking with the Father was what his soul required.

PRAYER:

Lord, you know that sometimes we want to stop, to take a pause and throw in the towel, especially when things become challenging. Help us see the example as you journey to the cross and know that we are capable of whatever work you call us to, because we don't work at it alone. You, God, are with us, yoked together, so that in all things, difficult or not, you are there to help and to guide. May we learn to lean more heavily on you.

Amen.



March 28th

March 29th

Weekend

Selah

**"Who is this King of glory? The Lord
of hosts, He is the King of glory.
Selah".**

- Psalm 24:10

Spiritual Practice: Breath Prayer

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Examples: “Be near, God,” “Jesus, my peace,” “Come, Holy Spirit.”

Step 2: Align Words with Breath

- Inhale: silently say the first part of your prayer.
- Exhale: silently say the second part.

Example: Inhale: “Come,” Exhale: “Holy Spirit.”

Step 3: Repeat

- Continue for 1–5 minutes (or longer if you like).
- Focus on your breathing and the prayer words.
- If your mind wanders, gently return to the rhythm.

Step 4: Close

- Take a final deep breath.
- Offer a simple “Thank you, Lord” or “Amen.”

Tips for Practice

- Use it anywhere: walking, waiting, or sitting quietly.
- Keep it simple. Your words can change daily.
- This practice is about presence, not perfection

Sometimes You Can't Get a Break

By Al Robinson

He said to them "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while" - Mark 6:31

Have you ever said, "I need a break," a pause, to rest but can't get one. I know that I have needed a break and couldn't get one. You know what, Jesus had the same problem. Jesus' disciples had just come back from their preaching trip, and people were coming and going where Jesus was staying. It was so busy that Jesus and the disciples could not eat a leisurely meal. On top of that, Jesus had learned that his cousin, John the Baptizer, had been murdered. He said to his disciples, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." (Mark 6:31)

So off Jesus and his disciples go. When they got to the deserted place, they found that the crowd had figured out where they were going and got there first. So instead of getting a break, Jesus keeps going. He has compassion on the crowd, teaches them, and feeds 5,000 men and probably women and children, too. After this, Jesus dismisses the crowd and says farewell to his disciples and gets his break. (Mark 6:30-46)

Sometimes people need us more than we need a break. When we can't get a break or a pause, we need to ask God for more patience, more compassion. For God never burdens us with more than we can handle. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. (Philippians 4:13) Also, we need to remember that it is OK, politely, to say, I need you to go away - I need a break. Jesus did.

PRAYER:

O God, help us to know when to keep going and when to send the people away and get a break.

Amen.

Weekly Pause

pause /'pɑ:z/ noun

a control that you use when you want to stop a recorded song, movie, etc., for a short time

Consider this definition of “pause” as you pause today.

A handy feature on a remote control: the pause button. It allows you a break when you need to run to the restroom, or it offers the space to give your attention to something else for a moment. Jesus hit the “pause button” on his ministry from time to time and instead of limiting his ministry, it often enhanced it. Consider the story from Mark 5 when Jesus is on the way to heal Jarius’ daughter and hits the “pause button” on that mission to heal a woman with a blood disease. Those not understanding that a pause would not deter Jesus, assumed the daughters death was the outcome. Yet, the woman was healed and so was the daughter.

Do you ever resist pausing? What concerns arise for you when you consider the need for pausing?

How have you experienced healthy pauses in your life?

Is there anything that God is asking you to press the “pause button” on in your life?

HOLY WEEK

March 29th - April 5th

Selah

**"Stand in awe, and sin not:
commune with your own heart upon
your bed, and be still.
Selah".
- Psalm 4:4**

As we approach Easter Sunday, take these final days of Holy Week to immerse yourself in the story of Christ's journey to the cross.

Read John 12-20 this week and walk with Jesus from his entry into Jerusalem (Psalm Sunday), his last supper with his disciples (Maundy Thursday), his crucifixion and burial (Good Friday) and his resurrection (Easter Sunday).





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