



# Christmas Pretox

## Finding some R&R amid the busyness

*'I want to simplify your lives. When others are telling you to read more, I want to tell you to read less; when others are telling you to do more, I want to tell you to do less. The world does not need more of you; it needs more of God. Your friends do not need more of you; they need more of God. And you don't need more of you, you need more of God'*

Eugene Petersen, *Subversive Spirituality*, p30

### What is the point of the Christmas Pretox?

I don't make enough time for the important things. I rush around too much. I get stressed. I feel sorry for myself. I put myself at the centre of my universe. And at Christmas, I do all these things more than ever. So the point of *the Christmas Pretox* is to help me to slow down, to help me focus on the right things. To re-dress the balance of a Christmas season which sees us spend more, eat more, drink more and get stressed more than any other time of year.

### Focus on what?

Christmas is a celebration which marks the birth of Jesus Christ, so I have used the book of Luke, which tells the story of Jesus as a basis for 24 daily readings. Luke was a doctor, who explains at the start of his book that he has 'carefully investigated everything from the beginning' and 'decided to write an orderly account'.

Whatever your personal beliefs about Jesus, I hope that you will find these readings interesting. Jesus of Nazareth remains a controversial figure but no one can dispute the profound impact that his words and actions have had on the world. If you are a sceptic, an agnostic or even an atheist, I hope you can find interest in some of the most influential teaching and stories of all time.

The daily readings take you on a journey backwards from Jesus' life. So they start with the accounts of his resurrection and death and take you through many of the key events and teachings of his short life. It means that the first few readings are a bit heavy as they deal with his arrest and death but don't let that put you off. As you go on you'll cover some of the most famous stories and incidents in his life and in the last few days, you will cover the traditional 'Christmas stories' relating to his birth.

### How it works

Each day, you are asked to set aside *at least* 10-15 minutes each day. Make sure you have a quiet space where you will not be interrupted. It would be worth setting aside a regular time each day if that is possible. There are 5 steps and there really is no rocket science to this - it is *very* simple:

1. **A time of silence**
2. **A reading** from Luke's gospel
3. **Reflection** - on a question related to the reading
4. **A second time of silence**
5. **Prayer/Focus** for the day ahead

#### 1. A time of silence

I have found it helpful to use the timer on my watch or phone to keep track on how long I have been silent. If you are not used to being silent, start with 1 minute. If you are more experienced, start with 2 or 3 minutes. Feel free to add to this as you go along the journey so that after 8 readings you add to the time. For example:

<i>Readings</i>	<i>New to this sort of thing</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>Experienced</i>
Days 1-7	1 min	3 mins	4 mins
Days 8-16	2 mins	4 mins	6 mins
Days 17-24	3 mins	5 mins	8 mins

The author and priest, Gerard Hughes, gives helpful advice about 'being still': (*Cry of Wonder*, 2014):

- *Sit with your feet flat on the ground, your back straight but not rigid, your body relaxed.*
- *Concentrate your attention on what you can feel in your body (Don't think, just focus your attention on what you can feel in your body)*
- *If you feel an itch or a discomfort, hear noises or have interesting thoughts, acknowledge what is happening but return to your physical feelings*
- *Once you are more relaxed – but do not be in any hurry – you might like to turn this exercise into more explicit prayer, repeating slowly to yourself, for example 'In God I live and move and have my being'. This is a way of meeting God in awareness of our own body, in our own surroundings*
- *It is good to begin prayer with a stillness exercise, however short. If you never move from on from stillness, you are still praying well. In Christian belief, it is God's Spirit who prays in us. Through stillness we can become more aware of this truth and join ourselves more wholeheartedly with God.*

## **2. Reading**

- I have intentionally used contemporary versions of Luke's gospel and have re-produced them on a separate sheet. I hope this helps readers encounter the text in a fresher way than using traditional translations.
- Try to read slowly, reflectively and to come to the text with fresh eyes. What strikes you about what you are reading? What parts are moving or confusing? What do they say to you?

## **3. Reflection**

- I have supplied a simple question at the end of each reading to provoke thinking which connects the reading to our lives today
- You might find it helpful to have a notepad to jot down thoughts based on where your thinking takes you.

## **4. Second time of silence**

- Repeat the same time of silence

## **5. Prayer / time of Focus**

- Depending on what you are comfortable with, offer prayers to God about anything on your heart. This may be thoughts provoked by the reading, reflection and silence but may be about something you are grateful for or for your concerns about the day ahead.
- If you are not comfortable with praying, then focus on the challenges for the day ahead and make some resolutions for how you want to be in light of what you have been thinking about.

All the best and I hope you have a very Happy Christmas!

Jon Kuhrt, November 2015

[www.resistanceandrenewal.net](http://www.resistanceandrenewal.net)



# Christmas Pretox

## Daily Readings

Day 1- Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> December

### Hope...and new life?

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence – Prayer*

*Jesus has died and buried. His followers who left everything to follow him are now scared and scattered. Two of them leave the dangers of Jerusalem to take refuge in a village but on the way they meet a mysterious stranger...*

#### **Reading** Luke 24:13-35 (GNB)

On that same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking to each other about all the things that had happened. As they talked and discussed, Jesus himself drew near and walked along with them; they saw him, but somehow did not recognize him. Jesus said to them, "What are you talking about to each other, as you walk along?"

They stood still, with sad faces. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have been happening there these last few days?" "What things?" he asked. "The things that happened to Jesus of Nazareth," they answered. "This man was a prophet and was considered by God and by all the people to be powerful in everything he said and did. Our chief priests and rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and he was crucified. <sup>21</sup> And we had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free! Besides all that, this is now the third day since it happened. Some of the women of our group surprised us; they went at dawn to the tomb, but could not find his body. They came back saying they had seen a vision of angels who told them that he is alive. Some of our group went to the tomb and found it exactly as the women had said, but they did not see him."

Then Jesus said to them, "How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said! Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then to enter his glory?" And Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets.

As they came near the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther; but they held him back, saying, "Stay with us; the day is almost over and it is getting dark." So he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup> He sat down to eat with them, took the bread, and said the blessing; then he broke the bread and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. They said to each other, "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"

They got up at once and went back to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven disciples gathered together with the others and saying, "The Lord is risen indeed! He has appeared to Simon!" The two then explained to them what had happened on the road, and how they had recognized the Lord when he broke the bread.

**Reflect: These two men left the city in desolation and utter sadness – but they returned with hope in their hearts. What gives you hope for the future?**

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Day 2 – Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December

## **Overcome with grief**

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

*Jesus is condemned by the Jewish and Roman rulers and is crucified along with two criminals. His followers are overcome with grief.*

**Reading** Luke 23: 26-27, 32-49 (GNB)

The soldiers led Jesus away, and as they were going, they met a man from Cyrene named Simon who was coming into the city from the country. They seized him, put the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus.

A large crowd of people followed him; among them were some women who were weeping and wailing for him.

Two other men, both of them criminals, were also led out to be put to death with Jesus. When they came to the place called “The Skull,” they crucified Jesus there, and the two criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. Jesus said, “Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing.”

They divided his clothes among themselves by throwing dice. The people stood there watching while the Jewish leaders made fun of him: “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah whom God has chosen!”

The soldiers also made fun of him: they came up to him and offered him cheap wine,<sup>37</sup> and said, “Save yourself if you are the king of the Jews!”

Above him were written these words: “This is the King of the Jews.”

One of the criminals hanging there hurled insults at him: “Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

The other one, however, rebuked him, saying, “Don't you fear God? You received the same sentence he did. Ours, however, is only right, because we are getting what we deserve for what we did; but he has done no wrong.” And he said to Jesus, “Remember me, Jesus, when you come as King!”

Jesus said to him, “I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me.”

It was about twelve o'clock when the sun stopped shining and darkness covered the whole country until three o'clock; and the curtain hanging in the Temple was torn in two. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Father! In your hands I place my spirit!” He said this and died.

The army officer saw what had happened, and he praised God, saying, “Certainly he was a good man!”

When the people who had gathered there to watch the spectacle saw what happened, they all went back home, beating their breasts in sorrow. All those who knew Jesus personally, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance to watch.

**Reflect: When you have felt great sadness or grief, what has helped you the most to cope?**

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Day 3 - Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December

## A dangerous man?

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

*Jesus is pulled up in front of the Jewish rulers and then taken to Pilate, the Governor who oversees the occupying Roman forces, because the religious leaders want Jesus executed.*

**Reading:** Luke 22:66-23:1-5 & 14-25 (GNB)

When day came, the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law met together, and Jesus was brought before the Council. “Tell us,” they said, “are you the Messiah?”

He answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me; and if I ask you a question, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right side of Almighty God.”

They all said, “Are you, then, the Son of God?” He answered them, “You say that I am.”

And they said, “We don't need any witnesses! We ourselves have heard what he said!”

The whole group rose up and took Jesus before Pilate, where they began to accuse him: “We caught this man misleading our people, telling them not to pay taxes to the Emperor and claiming that he himself is the Messiah, a king.”

Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “So you say,” answered Jesus.

Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no reason to condemn this man.”

But they insisted even more strongly, “With his teaching he is starting a riot among the people all through Judea. He began in Galilee and now has come here.”

Pilate called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, “You brought this man to me and said that he was misleading the people. Now, I have examined him here in your presence, and I have not found him guilty of any of the crimes you accuse him of...There is nothing this man has done to deserve death. So I will have him whipped and let him go.” The whole crowd cried out, “Kill him! Set Barabbas free for us!” (Barabbas had been put in prison for a riot that had taken place in the city, and for murder.)

Pilate wanted to set Jesus free, so he appealed to the crowd again. But they shouted back, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Pilate said to them the third time, “But what crime has he committed? I cannot find anything he has done to deserve death! I will have him whipped and set him free.”

But they kept on shouting at the top of their voices that Jesus should be crucified, and finally their shouting succeeded. So Pilate passed the sentence on Jesus that they were asking for. He set free the man they wanted, the one who had been put in prison for riot and murder, and he handed Jesus over for them to do as they wished.

**Reflect:** *Why did Pilate cave in to the crowd's demands? Do you ever feel the pressure to go with the flow rather than doing the right thing?*

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Day 4 - Friday 4th December

## Arrogance and integrity

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading:** Luke 20:45 – 21:4 (GNB)

As all the people listened to him, Jesus said to his disciples, “Be on your guard against the teachers of the Law, who like to walk around in their long robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplace; who choose the reserved seats in the synagogues and the best places at feasts; who take advantage of widows and rob them of their homes, and then make a show of saying long prayers! Their punishment will be all the worse!”

Jesus looked around and saw rich people dropping their gifts in the Temple treasury, and he also saw a very poor widow dropping in two little copper coins. He said, “I tell you that this poor widow put in more than all the others. For the others offered their gifts from what they had to spare of their riches; but she, poor as she is, gave all she had to live on.”

**Reflect:** *In what ways can you be tempted to do things for show and to look impressive? In what ways are you challenged by the quiet generosity of the widow?*

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Day 5 – Saturday 5th December

## A complete transformation

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

*From a Jewish perspective at that time, tax collectors were traitors, collaborators with the Roman Empire who creamed off extra profits to line their own pockets. And Zacchaeus was a senior tax collector in a major city...*

**Reading:** Luke 19: 1-9 (GNB)

Jesus went on into Jericho and was passing through. There was a chief tax collector there named Zacchaeus, who was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was a little man and could not see Jesus because of the crowd. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, who was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to that place, he looked up and said to Zacchaeus, “Hurry down, Zacchaeus, because I must stay in your house today.”

Zacchaeus hurried down and welcomed him with great joy. <sup>7</sup> All the people who saw it started grumbling, “This man has gone as a guest to the home of a sinner!”

Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Listen, sir! I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times as much.”

Jesus said to him, “Salvation has come to this house today, for this man, also, is a descendant of Abraham.

**Reflect:** *Are there any debts that you need to settle? These may be practical or to do with relationships which need mending, or behaviour which needs to be apologized for. What steps could you take to resolve them?*

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Day 6 - Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December

## Self-righteousness

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading:** Luke: 18:9 – 14 (GNB)

Jesus also told this parable to people who were sure of their own goodness and despised everybody else. “Once there were two men who went up to the Temple to pray: one was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood apart by himself and prayed, ‘I thank you, God, that I am not greedy, dishonest, or an adulterer, like everybody else. I thank you that I am not like that tax collector over there. I fast two days a week, and I give you one tenth of all my income.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance and would not even raise his face to heaven, but beat on his breast and said, ‘God, have pity on me, a sinner!’ I tell you,” said Jesus, “the tax collector, and not the Pharisee, was in the right with God when he went home. For those who make themselves great will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be made great.”

**Reflect:** *Think about someone you know who is humble. What is the impact of their behaviour and what example do they give you?*

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Day 7 – Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December

## A homecoming

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading:** Luke 15:11-32 (GNB)

Then Jesus said, “There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, ‘Father, I want my inheritance right now!’

“So the father divided the property between them. It wasn’t long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt. He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten the corncobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any.

“That brought him to his senses. He said, ‘All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I’m going back to my father. I’ll say to him, Father, I’ve sinned against God, I’ve sinned before you; I don’t deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.’ He got right up and went home to his father.

“When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: ‘Father, I’ve sinned against God, I’ve sinned before you; I don’t deserve to be called your son ever again.’

“But the father wasn’t listening. He was calling to the servants, ‘Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We’re going to feast! We’re going to have a wonderful time! My son is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!’ And they began to have a wonderful time.

“All this time his older son was out in the field. When the day’s work was done he came in. As he approached the house, he heard the music and dancing. Calling over one of the houseboys, he asked what was going on. He told him, ‘Your brother came home. Your father has ordered a feast—barbecued beef!—because he has him home safe and sound.’

“The older brother stalked off in an angry sulk and refused to join in. His father came out and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn’t listen. The son said, ‘Look how many years I’ve stayed here serving you, never giving you one moment of grief, but have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? Then this son of yours who has thrown away your money on whores shows up and you go all out with a feast!’

“His father said, ‘Son, you don’t understand. You’re with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours—but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he’s alive! He was lost, and he’s found!’”

**Reflect: Think about the different characters in this story: the Father, the younger son, the older son, the servants. Who do you most identify with?**

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Day 8 – Tuesday 8th December

## Religious hypocrisy

**Note:** please increase your time of silence in line with guidelines at start  
*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading** Luke: 13:10-17 (GNB)

One Sabbath Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. A woman there had an evil spirit that had kept her sick for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called out to her, “Woman, you are free from your sickness!” He placed his hands on her, and at once she straightened herself up and praised God.

The official of the synagogue was angry that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, so he spoke up and said to the people, “There are six days in which we should work; so come during those days and be healed, but not on the Sabbath!”

The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Any one of you would untie your ox or your donkey from the stall and take it out to give it water on the Sabbath. Now here is this descendant of Abraham whom Satan has kept in bonds for eighteen years; should she not be released on the Sabbath?” His answer made his enemies ashamed of themselves, while the people rejoiced over all the wonderful things that he did.

**Reflect: In your experiences of religion and religious people, what have you encountered more - integrity or hypocrisy?**

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Day 9 - Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> December

## **‘Your life is not made up of the things you own’**

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading** Luke: 12:13-21 (GNB)

A man in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide with me the property our father left us.” Jesus answered him, “Friend, who gave me the right to judge or to divide the property between you two?” And he went on to say to them all, “Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because your true life is not made up of the things you own, no matter how rich you may be.”

Then Jesus told them this parable: “There was once a rich man who had land which bore good crops. He began to think to himself, ‘I don't have a place to keep all my crops. What can I do? This is what I will do,’ he told himself; ‘I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, where I will store the grain and all my other goods. Then I will say to myself, Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself?’”

And Jesus concluded, “This is how it is with those who pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in God's sight.”

**Reflect: What was the rich man's wealth due to? What was wrong with his attitude? And how does this challenge the money-making culture of today?**

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Day 10: Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> December

## **How to pray**

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading** Luke: 11:1-13 (GNB)

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

He said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father, hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation.”

Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. "So I say to you: 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 fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 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 the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

***Reflect: Try to remember the last few things you have prayed for? How much do your prayers connect to the pattern that Jesus taught?***

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Day 11: Friday 11<sup>th</sup> December

## **'Who is my neighbour?'**

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading** Luke: 10:25-37 (GNB)

A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to receive eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?"

The man answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind'; and 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'"

"You are right," Jesus replied; "do this and you will live."

But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?"

Jesus answered, "There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came there, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by on the other side. But a Samaritan who was traveling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Take care of him,' he told the innkeeper, 'and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him.'"

And Jesus concluded, "In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbour toward the man attacked by the robbers?"

The teacher of the Law answered, "The one who was kind to him."

Jesus replied, "You go, then, and do the same."

**Reflect: Do you see anyone struggling or in pain, who seems to be ignored or avoided by others? What could you do about it?**

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Day 12 – Saturday 12th December

## **‘Who do you say I am?’**

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

*The ‘Messiah’ was the long awaited king who would liberate Israel*

**Reading** Luke: 9:18-27 (GNB)

One day when Jesus was praying alone, the disciples came to him. “Who do the crowds say I am?” he asked them. “Some say that you are John the Baptist,” they answered. “Others say that you are Elijah, while others say that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”

“What about you?” he asked them. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are God’s Messiah.”

Then Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell this to anyone. He also told them, “The Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. He will be put to death, but three days later he will be raised to life.”

And he said to them all, “If you want to come with me, you must forget yourself, take up your cross every day, and follow me. For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it, but if you lose your life for my sake, you will save it. Will you gain anything if you win the whole world but are yourself lost or defeated?”

**Reflect: What does it mean to ‘forget yourself’? From what you have read so far, how does Jesus live out his own philosophy? How does it challenged you?**

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Day 13 – Sunday 13th December

## **‘Go back home and tell what God has done for you’**

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading** Luke 8:26-39 (GNB)

Jesus and his disciples sailed on over to the territory of Gerasa, which is across the lake from Galilee. As Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a man from the town who had demons in him. For a long time this man had gone without clothes and would not stay at home, but spent his time in the burial caves. When he saw Jesus, he gave a loud cry, threw himself down at his feet, and shouted, “Jesus, Son of the Most High God! What do you want with me? I beg you, don’t punish me!” He said this because Jesus had ordered the evil spirit to go out of him. Many times it had seized him, and even though he was kept a prisoner, his hands and feet tied with chains, he would break the chains and be driven by the demon out into the desert.

Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“My name is ‘Legion,’” he answered—because many demons had gone into him. The demons begged Jesus not to send them into the abyss.

There was a large herd of pigs near-by, feeding on a hillside. So the demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he let them. They went out of the man and into the pigs. The whole herd rushed down the side of the cliff into the lake and was drowned.

The men who had been taking care of the pigs saw what happened, so they ran off and spread the news in the town and among the farms. People went out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they were all afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the man had been cured. Then all the people from that territory asked Jesus to go away, because they were terribly afraid. So Jesus got into the boat and left. The man from whom the demons had gone out begged Jesus, "Let me go with you."

But Jesus sent him away, saying, "Go back home and tell what God has done for you." The man went through the town, telling what Jesus had done for him.

***Reflect: The man had experienced a dramatic transformation and was grateful to Jesus. What would you describe as 'God-given' in your life?***

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Day 14 - Monday 14th December

## **'Listen...if you have ears'**

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading** Luke 8:1-15 (GNB)

People kept coming to Jesus from one town after another; and when a great crowd gathered, Jesus told this parable:

"Once there was a man who went out to sow grain. As he scattered the seed in the field, some of it fell along the path, where it was stepped on, and the birds ate it up. Some of it fell on rocky ground, and when the plants sprouted, they dried up because the soil had no moisture. Some of the seed fell among thorn bushes, which grew up with the plants and choked them. And some seeds fell in good soil; the plants grew and bore grain, one hundred grains each."

And Jesus concluded, "Listen, then, if you have ears!"

His disciples asked Jesus what this parable meant, and he answered, "The knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of God has been given to you, but to the rest it comes by means of parables, so that they may look but not see, and listen but not understand.

"This is what the parable means: the seed is the word of God. The seeds that fell along the path stand for those who hear; but the Devil comes and takes the message away from their hearts in order to keep them from believing and being saved. The seeds that fell on rocky ground stand for those who hear the message and receive it gladly. But it does not sink deep into them; they believe only for a while but when the time of testing comes, they fall away. The seeds that fell among thorn bushes stand for those who hear; but the worries and riches and pleasures of this life crowd in and choke them, and their fruit never ripens. The seeds that fell in good soil stand for those who hear the message and retain it in a good and obedient heart, and they persist until they bear fruit.

***Reflect: When you think about how your life has gone, do you feel like you have been planted in good soil and are being fruitful? What aspects of you have been stolen away, dried up or choked by anxieties?***

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Day 15 - Tuesday 15th December

## **A tree is known by its fruit**

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading** Luke 6:43-49 (GNB)

“A healthy tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a poor tree bear good fruit. Every tree is known by the fruit it bears; you do not pick figs from thorn bushes or gather grapes from bramble bushes. A good person brings good out of the treasure of good things in his heart; a bad person brings bad out of his treasure of bad things. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and yet don't do what I tell you? Anyone who comes to me and listens to my words and obeys them—I will show you what he is like. He is like a man who, in building his house, dug deep and laid the foundation on rock. The river flooded over and hit that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But anyone who hears my words and does not obey them is like a man who built his house without laying a foundation; when the flood hit that house it fell at once—and what a terrible crash that was!”

**Reflect:** *Does your life feel ‘well built’? In what ways are your foundations firm and strong, and in what ways are they shaky and vulnerable?*

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Day 16 - Tuesday 16th December

## **‘Do not judge others’**

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading** Luke 6:37-42 (GNB)

“Do not judge others, and God will not judge you; do not condemn others, and God will not condemn you; forgive others, and God will forgive you. Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands—all that you can hold. The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you.”

And Jesus told them this parable: “One blind man cannot lead another one; if he does, both will fall into a ditch. No pupils are greater than their teacher; but all pupils, when they have completed their training, will be like their teacher.

“Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but pay no attention to the log in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Please, brother, let me take that speck out of your eye,’ yet cannot even see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite! First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

**Reflect: Do you ever focus on the 'specks' in others? And how do you respond when people are critical of you?**

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Day 17 - Wednesday 17th December

## **'Love your enemies and do good to them'**

**Note:** please increase your time of silence in line with guidelines at start  
*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading:** Luke 6:27-36 (GNB)

"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you. If anyone hits you on one cheek, let him hit the other one too; if someone takes your coat, let him have your shirt as well. Give to everyone who asks you for something, and when someone takes what is yours, do not ask for it back. Do for others just what you want them to do for you.

"If you love only the people who love you, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners love those who love them! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners do that! And if you lend only to those from whom you hope to get it back, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount! No! Love your enemies and do good to them; lend and expect nothing back. You will then have a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High God. For he is good to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful just as your Father is merciful."

**Reflect: Think about the person you would least want to pray for. Reflect on why they have come to mind and what it would take for you to think differently.**

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Day 18 - Thursday 18th December

## **'Jesus stretched out and touched him'**

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading:** Luke 5: 12-16 (GNB)

Once Jesus was in a town where there was a man who was suffering from a dreaded skin disease. When he saw Jesus, he threw himself down and begged him, "Sir, if you want to, you can make me clean!"

Jesus reached out and touched him. "I do want to," he answered. "Be clean!" At once the disease left the man. Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go straight to the priest and let him examine you; then to prove to everyone that you are cured, offer the sacrifice as Moses ordered."

But the news about Jesus spread all the more widely, and crowds of people came to hear him and be healed from their diseases. But he would go away to lonely places, where he prayed.

**Reflect: This man suffered from a dreaded skin disease, so Jesus' touching him would be seen a real risk? What boundaries might you need to cross to reach out to someone in need?**

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Day 19 - Friday 19th December

## **‘Go away from me, I am a sinful man’**

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading:** Luke 5:1-11 (GNB)

One day Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret while the people pushed their way up to him to listen to the word of God. He saw two boats pulled up on the beach; the fishermen had left them and were washing the nets. Jesus got into one of the boats—it belonged to Simon—and asked him to push off a little from the shore.

Jesus sat in the boat and taught the crowd.

When he finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Push the boat out further to the deep water, and you and your partners let down your nets for a catch.”

“Master,” Simon answered, “we worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will let down the nets.” They let them down and caught such a large number of fish that the nets were about to break. So they motioned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full of fish that the boats were about to sink. When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he fell on his knees before Jesus and said, “Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man!”

He and the others with him were all amazed at the large number of fish they had caught. The same was true of Simon's partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus said to Simon, “Don't be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”

They pulled the boats up on the beach, left everything, and followed Jesus.

***Reflect: Simon Peter shares honestly his view of himself - but Jesus replies ‘Don’t be afraid’? How much does fear hold you back?***

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Day 20 - Saturday 20th December

## **Jesus begins his work**

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading:** Luke 4: 38-44 (GNB)

Jesus left the synagogue and went to Simon's home. Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a high fever, and they spoke to Jesus about her. He went and stood at her bedside and ordered the fever to leave her. The fever left her, and she got up at once and began to wait on them.

After sunset all who had friends who were sick with various diseases brought them to Jesus; he placed his hands on every one of them and healed them all.<sup>41</sup> Demons also went out from many people, screaming, “You are the Son of God!”

Jesus gave the demons an order and would not let them speak, because they knew he was the Messiah. At daybreak Jesus left the town and went off to a lonely place. The people started looking for him, and when they found him, they tried to keep him from leaving. But he said to them, "I must preach the Good News about the Kingdom of God in other towns also, because that is what God sent me to do." So he preached in the synagogues throughout the country.

**Reflect: As Jesus popularity grows, why do you think he makes time to get up so early and go off to a quiet place by himself? Does time and space to reflect help you focus on what you need to do?**

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Day 21 - Sunday 21st December

## 'Good news to the poor'

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

*Jesus returns home to Nazareth and reads in the synagogue. Some people have described this as his manifesto for his life's work.*

**Reading:** Luke 4:14-21 (GNB)

Then Jesus returned to Galilee, and the power of the Holy Spirit was with him. The news about him spread throughout all that territory. He taught in the synagogues and was praised by everyone.

Then Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath he went as usual to the synagogue. He stood up to read the Scriptures and was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to set free the oppressed

and announce that the time has come

when the Lord will save his people."

Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. All the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on him, as he said to them, "This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read."

**Reflect: Think through the transformations that Jesus declared would happen – good news to the poor, liberty to captives, to set free the oppressed. From what you have read in the last 21 days, did he live up to this manifesto?**

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Day 22 - Monday 22nd December

## Temptation

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading:** Luke 4:1-13 (GNB)

Jesus returned from the Jordan full of the Holy Spirit and was led by the Spirit into the desert, <sup>2</sup> where he was tempted by the Devil for forty days. In all that time he ate nothing, so that he was hungry when it was over.

The Devil said to him, “If you are God's Son, order this stone to turn into bread.”

But Jesus answered, “The scripture says, ‘Human beings cannot live on bread alone.’”

Then the Devil took him up and showed him in a second all the kingdoms of the world. “I will give you all this power and all this wealth,” the Devil told him. “It has all been handed over to me, and I can give it to anyone I choose.”<sup>7</sup> All this will be yours, then, if you worship me.”

Jesus answered, “The scripture says, ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!’”

Then the Devil took him to Jerusalem and set him on the highest point of the Temple, and said to him, “If you are God's Son, throw yourself down from here. For the scripture says, ‘God will order his angels to take good care of you.’ It also says, ‘They will hold you up with their hands so that not even your feet will be hurt on the stones.’”

But Jesus answered, “The scripture says, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

When the Devil finished tempting Jesus in every way, he left him for a while.

***Reflect: Jesus resisted these short-cuts to display power and impress people. What are the chief temptations you face and how do you resist them?***

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Day 23 - Tuesday 23rd December

## Peace on earth?

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

**Reading:** Luke 2:8-20 (GNB)

There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, but the angel said to them, “Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Savior was born—Christ the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God:

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!”

When the angels went away from them back into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger. When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about the child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said. Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them. The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen; it had been just as the angel had told them.

**Reflect: At that time shepherds were considered mistrusted vagabonds – why were they chosen as the first witnesses of this special birth? What does all this say about God’s priorities?**

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Day 24 - Wednesday 24th December

## No room in the inn

*Stilling & Silence – Reading – Reflect – Silence - Prayer*

*The political-economic requirements of the occupying Roman forces meant that Joseph and Mary had to make a trip back to his home town.*

**Reading:** Luke 2:1-7 (GNB)

At that time Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria. Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own hometown.

Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the birthplace of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger—there was no room for them to stay in the inn.

**Reflect: Jesus was just one insignificant person, brought into a world dominated by the mighty Roman Empire. Yet 2000 years on millions of people celebrate and mark this birth. Why do we do this? Why has the life of Jesus Christ so intrigued and captivated so many people?**

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## Happy Christmas!

Have a brilliant day tomorrow and thanks for completing R&R at Christmas! I hope these readings help you enjoy this time of year more than ever. Please post up your thoughts and reflections at the Christmas Pretox page on [www.resistanceandrenewal.net](http://www.resistanceandrenewal.net) or email me on [mrjonkuhrt@gmail.com](mailto:mrjonkuhrt@gmail.com)

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