

Prayers for Presence



Day One

Lord, here I am. Open hands, open heart. I welcome the quiet, as I turn the noise down a few notches. I welcome what you have to say to me. I know I have baggage, will you help me see it for what it is? Excess. Burdensome. Holding me back. Help me see it from your perspective, help me see what I've been trying to drown out by digital drunkenness. Could it be feelings of inadequacy? Could it be fear? Could it be unmet desires or dashed hopes? Or could it just be plain old boredom, the temptation to push the fast forward button on life?

Make me aware of what's going on in me as I withdraw from what's familiar to me and head into purposeful presence with you and with the life that's in front of me. Whatever it is, work through it with me. I know you have grace for me, love for me, plans for me.

Today, I lay down my addiction to my screen and whatever is causing it in exchange for the gift of life. Today, I say yes and amen to facing my issues. Today, I say yes and amen to peace and presence. Today, I say yes and amen to the life I'm in the middle of, whether it's painful, pleasant, or just plain boring. Today, I say yes and amen to reclaiming the gift of Sabbath. Today, I say yes and amen to the start of a new and powerful way to live.

Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.

Psalm 51:10

Day Two

Hey there, Jesus. I'm gaining courage in this thing, learning to trust you in the quiet. Today I need you to open my eyes to what I've been missing. To the glorious people in my life, from those under my roof to the ones in my community. To my actual people, my crazy friends. To the gift of the history I have with them, and what I may have missed while looking to online people I'll never meet in person.

Open my eyes to what I've been missing by spending too much time on entertainment. Could it be rejuvenating exercise and moving my body? Could it be reading rich literature and growing in the knowledge of human nature? Could it be wild adventure or gathering my people over food? Could it be learning to cook or paint or play guitar, could it be listening to the crickets, writing a love letter, or singing my heart out with a preschooler with a speech impediment? Could it be baking a cake just to eat it or walking under the moon? Whatever it is, let it be mine. Not to be shared, not to compare.

Because, honestly Jesus, I feel FOMO when I watch everyone else live their lives online. I feel less than, uninvited, ugly, judgmental, jealous. And even though FOMO threatens to ruin me, I am drawn to it, like if I don't see what everyone's doing I'll be left out of the crowd, insignificant. Show me today that my actual life is super beautiful, with all its unsavory imperfections. Show me today that by choosing not to invest time in watching everyone post their highlights, I enjoy my regular moments a whole lot more. Show me today that when I share a moment with only you, or with only my people, they are more sacred, more valuable. And show me today that I've been comparing my insides with everyone else's outsides and how destructive it is.

Open my eyes.

Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you.

Proverbs 4:25

Day Three

Me again, Lord. I'm still here! I think I'm getting it a little bit, I think I'm getting the rhythm of what you're doing in me this week, and I'm hungry for more. I've laid down my toxic waste for something I want more: peace, joy, confidence, time, freedom, wellness, fun. But I need permission.

I need permission to play, to suck air into my lungs and feel the burn. I need permission to not feel guilty that I'm not constantly available. I need permission to keep saying "no" this week so I can continue to be intentional about detoxing. I need permission to enjoy the freedom I'm experiencing. I need permission to pursue my heart's desire without feeling condemnation or that I'm being unproductive. I need permission to not feel guilty for not keeping up with all my online people. I need permission to be introspective, to form my own opinions, to be confident and authentic in who I am offline. I need permission to be with my people in the flesh, to trust you with everyone else. I need permission to be grateful for what I have, whether it's a lot or a little. And I need permission to dream big, really really big.

I want to thrive, Lord. Like, really thrive. I want to move throughout today in the joy of being untethered to my screen, the joy of my original thoughts and ideas, the joy of having my hands free. Take me further today than we went yesterday, I'm all yours!

For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Day Four

Good morning, Jesus. Here we are, day four. I'm ready to talk to you about what your heart and hope is for me this week. I've been exploring and playing around with old habits and new passions, but I really want to dig into how this relates to your plan for my life. I'm not scared to lay it down anymore and I'm getting the feel of freedom. I know you have specific plans, places you want to heal me, change me, and blessings you want to give me. And I think that's where today's prayer starts, is at your feet like Mary of Bethany. As I sit with the hustle all around me, choosing the better thing, I know you won't take it away from me.

Will you teach me today? Will you teach me what your heart is in this whole thing? Will you teach me what it means to be present with you? Will you teach me how to listen? Will you teach me how to lean in? Will you teach me how to go against the grain when I'm being criticized for my choice to be present? Will you teach me what it is to choose the better thing, and what the better thing even is? Will you teach me to trust you with this deep and profound week of fasting?

I've read of the way you practiced presence with your people, the way you sat with the woman in a man's world, the way you spoke kindly to the woman of ill repute, the sinner whose house you invited yourself to, the marginalized, the broken, the traitors, the outcast. To each one you gave wisdom, healing, love, acceptance, your presence. Sign me up, Jesus. Meet me today.

But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.

John 14:26

Day Five

Hi there, God. You know, some things in me have changed already: attitudes, desires, impulses. I've gotten to feel what it's like to exhale, to put my life in your hands. I've gotten a taste of what it's like to trust you with the things that are important to me—rest, affirmation, friendships, restoration, my work, my schedule, my home, my creativity. But truthfully, I think I was hoping for more. If I take an honest look at my life, there's a lot I don't like about it. There's a lot I hoped would be different, and I find myself dwelling on those things, wishing I could fast forward to a whole different season. Help?

I remember the story of Esther, how she found herself in the (ahem) unsavory position of being ripped from her childhood home to participate in the virginal lineup and ultimately live in the palace either as queen or concubine. I doubt it was her dream as a young Jewish girl, to sleep with an older pagan king. And yet she knew you had placed her there for such a time as that. She rose up in courage, stepped into her real life, and made history.

Today, I want to take the listening further, taking this sacred space away from my screen to really hear from you how you're writing history through my story. You know the sad parts, the sweet parts, you know the things I do in obscurity, the menial tasks. You know where I shine and what's clouding that shine. You know what my hopes as a young woman were, and which things didn't pan out. Make me like Esther. Make me like the girl who fasted and prayed, who listened and then had the courage to walk in her real life. Who rose up in strength and dignity, even when found in an awful place. I want that. I want what Esther had; confidence to lean into her real, unretouched life.

As I press on this week, this day, I'm leaning in further. Straining to hear you, wanting to agree with you. Take me further up, take me further in. Today, in my boring or busy or bossy or beautiful life, I am all in with both feet.

If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?

Esther 4:14

Day Six

Hi there, Jesus, you're so sweet to meet me again! You faithfully show up, just when I need you. You've spoken such life over me this week, such kindness. You've encouraged me, taught me to be free in your gifts. You've shown me your presence and beauty in the things my screen was getting in the way of: people, food, creation, relationships, fun, art, adventure, music. The more I get to see and hear you, the more I like you.

I think I'm ready to speak the things I was afraid to admit when I was too tied up and distracted. Things like my worth doesn't come from my productivity, like I can trust you enough with my work to take a break. Like good fun and good food and adventure aren't silly or superfluous, but essential to life. Like it's not my responsibility to be everything to everyone. Like there is creativity and originality in me, like I am not weird if I want to go against the grain. Like I have more blessings than I realized, like I am strong and can face this life head on. I'm ready to accept that you have more for me than I have received: more love, more impact, more substance and significance than I was allowing because of my addiction to distraction.

As the detox winds down, I'm ready to keep practicing my new rhythms. To keep reaping the benefits of practicing presence. I'm ready to claim this rich and satisfying way of being as my new normal. I'm ready to make a new habit of being, of feeling all the feels, of leaning in rather than numbing out. I'm ready to look up and see that you are making everything beautiful for its own time. Right now. This week. Next month. As different as they all look, that's what you gave me, and I receive it.

The thief's purpose is to kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

John 10:10

Day Seven

So, Jesus, you know when you go to summer camp and it's daunting and scary and you don't know who you'll sit by at lunch or if anyone will talk to you and you hate the woods anyway and why won't your parents just pick you up? And then on the last day you're sniffling and crying and signing everyone's t-shirts and professing BFF status 4ever and you can't imagine having turned around as soon as you got there. Well, that's what this week seemed a little like. I dragged my feet a bit, expected to feel lonely or bored or deprived. I expected to be left alone and unheard or unseen, I expected hardship and deprivation and a case of the blahs. But today I find myself a little nostalgic, a little bit like I could keep this new habit of being forever.

I think as I go forward into my actual life, what I need is to remember. You tell your people over and over to remember what you did for them, so that's what I'm asking of you today. Help me remember that I can choose my digital participation, that I am under no obligation to opt in to what everyone else is doing. Help me remember that it's so much more blessed to experience real beautiful life than to scroll through it on the screen. Help me remember that my actual people thrive when I choose them over my virtual people. Help me remember the latent desires for adventure and creativity you put in me, and how I get to grow in them when I'm not on my device. Help me remember how much louder your voice is when I turn down the noise. Help me remember how loved I feel when I choose to listen to your voice above all the others. Help me remember how lovely peace feels, how delicious freedom from digital obligation feels. Help me to remember how good it feels to work when it's time to work and enjoy Sabbath when it's time to Sabbath. Help me remember that I am capable of building my life, one moment at a time, or tearing it down with my own hands. Help me remember I enjoyed a digital detox this week because you love me.

So Moses said to the people, "This is a day to remember forever—the day you left Egypt, the place of your slavery. Today the Lord has brought you out by the power of his mighty hand."

Exodus 13:3