

the time of your life : three meditations for the new year

for three pauses three hours ... three days ...or three weeks

These reflections include ideas and phrases from Anthony de Mello, Praying Body and Soul; from Macrina Wiederkehr, Seasons of your Heart; and from Joyce Rupp, Out of the Ordinary, and King David, and Jesus of Nazareth, as cited in the Bible.



For God alone my soul waits in silence Psalm 62.6

FIRST PAUSE :: For God alone

at a window over a garden,
before a candle on a table,
with a glass of wine,
or in a silent corner,

it is time to pause – for God alone.....

I close my eyes, notice my breathing, relax my shoulders, and become still for some minutes:

come, Spirit, come.

~ to ponder ~

“Live your life on purpose: this is the time of your life!” - said the square purple note that fell out of the book I had picked up.

“Look at those children, they're having the time of their lives”, we say, watching them scurry and chatter and laugh.

And you? Watching you, are you having the time of your life?
Am I living the life I love? Or loving the life I'm living?

Or are we scrambling about on the edges of our lives? Frustrated and dissatisfied somehow – this wasn't how it was meant to be.

“Something is pushing them
to the side of their own lives.”

... mused Philip Larkin, in Afternoons, watching us in an everyday park in England somewhere.

It's time to stop, pause and watch ourselves. Somewhere in the leisurely days of Christmas and New Year, there is a pausing time, and quiet space ... Claim it!

~ a poem ~

Joy came to me today,
out walking the dog at dawn.
No, it wasn't terribly early -
the shortest day of the year,
the rare clear morning sky
pale blue fading to a muted
pink on the horizon.
Wisps of vapour changed
colour as the light came.

Dog and I were dawn-treaders,
plodding the soggy heavy
tracks of a Midland woods.
It takes a while,
dawn-treading. . . .

Suddenly we faced into
the solar brightness
filtered by see-through trees.
We paused ...

Then, sun behind, we watched
six elongated legs
tread the dewy bright field
towards the short grey
noon of daily activities.

I had trod the dawn
with joy.



~ a psalm ~

Psalm 18 in The Message contains some startling lines:

A hostile world!
I call to God, I cry to God to help me.
From his palace he hears my call;
my cry brings me right into his presence— a private audience!
But me he caught—reached all the way from sky to sea;
he pulled me out ...[of] the void in which I was drowning.
...He stood me up on a wide-open field; I stood there
saved—surprised to be loved!

If you read this three times, out loud, and slowly, I wonder which phrase will resonate for you?

Try it and see.

~ a prayer ~

You might like to close this 'First Pause' with The Lord's Prayer (*an alternative version from the New Zealand Prayer Book 2005*)

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and shall be,
Mother and Father of us all,
Loving God in whom is heaven -

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe
the way of your justice be followed by all peoples on Earth,
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain out hope and come on Earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us;
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us;
In times of temptation and test, spare us;
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is Love, now and forever. Amen.

SECOND PAUSE :: my soul waits

at a window over a garden,
before a candle on a table,
with a glass of wine,
or in a silent corner,

it is time to pause – my soul waits

I close my eyes, notice my breathing, relax my shoulders, and become still for some minutes:

come, Spirit, come.

~ to ponder ~

With Advent receding with its message of light in the darkness, I have been struck by the candles of hope, love, joy, peace.

These beautiful qualities of a life well-lived, to what extent did they feature in my year that is ending?

Was hope a constant theme? Did an inner peace prevail?
Was there love in abundance? How deep was the joy?



Take some minutes to reflect on your year as it closes.

Which of these four – hope, love, joy, peace - was a feature of your year?

Which one was most lacking?

Notice what has first come to the surface stay with that.

Review the outer and inner journey of the year and consider why one might have been scarce and another abundant. What does this tell you about the year?

Talk to God as honestly as you can.

Name some of your 'epiphanies' of the past year – your discoveries of the Holy One in your midst?
How did you grow because of them?

How did your experience of the past year affect the world in which you live?

So, ... what name might you give to your experience of this year?

What image or metaphor would you use to talk about it?

~ a poem ~

To a semi-circle: seeking wisdom

Alone among the shapes I meet,
you rest, content and incomplete;
no rounded symmetry I see,
nor perfect immortality.
Your half-formed body, foetal soul
seems broken, wounded, far from whole.
Your pair of angles doesn't quite
square the circle, set things right.

Yet, should I look beyond such flaws,
open up my blinkered doors,
perhaps I'd see through different eyes:
your gentle promise, silver-bright
shining half-moon in the night.

(Peter Sidebotham)

~ a psalm ~

Another part of the quirky Psalm 18 (MSG) helps us review the year:

God made my life complete when I placed all the pieces before him.
When I got my act together, he gave me a fresh start.
Now I'm alert to God's ways; I don't take God for granted.
Every day I review the ways he works; I try not to miss a trick.
I feel put back together, and I'm watching my step.
God rewrote the text of my life when I opened the book of my heart to his eyes.

Hmm, did I at any point this past year really place all the pieces before God?

When was it God gave me a fresh start? (did I miss that?)

How might I review the ways God works every day?

If only I could feel put back together

~ a prayer ~

The examen is an approach to daily prayer that can ensure I don't take God for granted; it might even help me not miss a trick; it certainly opens the book of my heart to God's eyes ...

Place your hand on your heart and ask Jesus or God or the Holy Spirit to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are most grateful.

Ask the Holy One to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are least grateful.

Let your feelings surface. You may wish to take some deep breaths and let God's love fill you just the way you are.

Give thanks for whatever you have experienced. (You may like to journal your learnings or share them with a family member or friend.)

~ appendix ~

If you want to delve deeper, you could complete these simple sentences, adapted from Anthony de Mello: Praying Body and Soul... and make some of your own:

these are the people who have been dear to me....

these are the ideas and experiences that have brought me energy ...

these are the concepts and experiences that have tripped me up ...

these are the dangers I have flirted with ...

these are the sufferings that have matured me ...

these are the regrets I have

these are the gifts I have received ...

THIRD PAUSE :: in silence

at a window over a garden,
before a candle on a table,
with a glass of wine,
or in a silent corner,

it is time to pause – in silence

I close my eyes, notice my breathing, relax my shoulders, and become still for some minutes:

come, Spirit, come.

~ a poem ~

An amazing presence . . .

I am touched to the core
With a presence I cannot explain.
A loving plan enfolds me.
Someone is always believing in me,
Calling me forth, calling me on.
I am standing in grace,
Filled with mystery,
Touched with the eternal.
I cannot get away from goodness – I think we name you God.



You surround me like a gentle breeze
My idols live on in my life.
My inconsistent values stay.
My immaturity walks beside me.
My sin is ever before me.
Your love for me stays the same.
I tremble in the face of such graciousness;
Your reverence for me astounds me
You breathe out hope
And I catch on ...

(Macrina Wiederkehr)

~ to ponder ~

What name would you like your new year to have?

What gifts do you bring with you into the year ahead?

Do you find any resistance within you? Of what are you most afraid as you enter the new year?

How is your relationship with the Holy One at this time?

What is at the heart of your new year prayer?

What do you need in order to follow Jesus faithfully in the months that lie ahead?

What do you hope to contribute to the world around you in this coming year?

~ a psalm ~

Psalm 18 (MSG) again -

I love you, God—you make me strong.

God is bedrock under my feet, the castle in which I live, my rescuing knight.

My God—the high crag where I run for dear life, hiding behind the boulders,
safe in the granite hideout.

I sing to God, the Praise-Lofty, and find myself safe and saved.

25-27 (NRSV)

With the loyal you show yourself loyal,

With the blameless you show yourself blameless

With the pure you show yourself pure

and with the crooked you show yourself perverse.

For you deliver a humble people, but the haughty eyes you bring down.

It is you who light my lamp; the LORD, my God lights up my darkness

By you I can crush a troop,

and by my God I can leap over a wall.

30 (MSG)

What a God! His road stretches straight and smooth.

Every God-direction is road-tested.

Everyone who runs toward him makes it.

...you hold me up with a firm hand, caress me with your gentle ways.

You cleared the ground under me so my footing was firm.

~ a prayer ~

A Prayer for Standing on Tiptoe

On tiptoe we stand, Lord Jesus,
eagerly awaiting your full revelation
always expecting you
to come some more.

Our hands and our hearts are open to your grace.
Our lives still waiting for the fullness of your presence.
We are those who have been promised
a Kingdom, and we can never forget
Yet we have a foot in both worlds
and so we stumble.

But still we stand on tiptoe
Owning our kingdom-loving hearts
and our earth-eyes
We lean forward and hope.

(Macrina Wiederkehr)



... and so our three pauses done,
our souls continue to wait in silence
for God alone.

May the gentleness and strength of the Creator
the delight and vulnerability of the Way of Jesus
the graceful mystery of the Spirit,
be with you now and always.
Amen.