



WORDS FOR THE WILDERNESS

A preparation guide for Easter



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INTRODUCTION

Overview

The season before Easter is often referred to as Lent. Many Christian traditions observe Lent with an intentional time of fasting and self-examination. The goal is to further identify with and turn toward Jesus. Symbolically, we enter into the wilderness with Him, empty ourselves of lesser affections, and focus on the treasure that truly matters. We move from a posture of self-seeking towards a posture of self-denial. We embrace the pain of the cross, and cling to Jesus as our Savior. Lent is a long, slow season. Before we can fully enter into Easter celebration, we must first remember our need for forgiveness and a Savior.

Liturgical Tradition

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and lasts 40 days (excluding Sundays), representing Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness. The ashes symbolize the idea that we were created from dust and are destined to return to dust. Many church traditions display this through marking the forehead with ash in the shape of a cross, signaling the beginning of mourning and self-denial. The end of Lent is referred to as Holy Week, which is the week leading up to Jesus' death. Holy Week starts with Palm Sunday (Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem), moves into Maundy Thursday (the Last Supper), culminates with Good Friday (the crucifixion), and concludes with Holy Saturday (the day of death). While the Advent season is marked by anticipation of the growing light accompanied by the hope laid in a manger, Lent is the season marked by a dimming light as our Savior approaches His tomb and we enter into mourning.

Symbols: the cross, ash, crown of thorns, nails, wine and bread

Colors: purple (sacrifice and preparation), black (death, mourning)

Posture: sorrowful, repentance, reflective

This Guide

This 7 week guide will lead you through a passage of scripture, some prayers and songs, reflection questions, and a suggested fast. Each Sunday, read the passage from the Beatitudes and spend some time in reflection and prayer. Use this time to prepare your heart for the upcoming fast and posture yourself in a way that orients you towards Christ. The goal of this guide isn't meant to only be used on Sundays but rather to help us establish a rhythm of emptying ourselves before the Lord and make room to be filled by His Spirit as we live out our daily lives.

What is Fasting?

In the Bible, fasting is always from food. However, we can 'fast' from other things, as well, if doing so helps draw us closer to the Lord. We don't simply just abstain from food or TV, but rather use that vacancy to turn and find the provision and nearness of Christ. Fasting isn't to earn something from God or to prove how "good" of a Christian we are. We fast to join in the sufferings of Christ and identify ourselves with Him.

Each week, this guide will present a different gift from God to fast from and some helpful suggestions for how to orient our hearts in a way that draws us closer to the greatest gift we could ever receive. The suggested fasts range from food to sleep. If these fasts are intimidating to you, feel free to approach them in a way that allows for you to freely engage in these disciplines. You might consider building each week onto the next. Meaning that week 2 also includes week 1 and so on. Fasting is challenging because it exposes our dependence on comfort and convenience. We encourage you to try to step out of your comfort zone and use this season to identify with the sufferings of Christ.

Weekly Fasting Schedule

Week 1: Food

Week 2: Caffeine/Beverages

Week 3: Sweets

Week 4: Music/Podcasts

Week 5: Media

Week 6: Shopping

Week 7: Sleep



WEEK 1

February 22-25

POSTURE AND INTENTIONS

Passage: Matthew 5:1-12

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the gentle, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in Heaven is great; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Devotional

In Matthew 4, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for 40 days. This time is symbolic, representing the 40 years the Israelites spent wandering in the desert due to their lack of trust in God's provision. In this desolate place, Jesus refused the temptation to satisfy His needs and desires apart from God. Through His example, we see what it means to be a faithful child of God. From the wilderness, Jesus goes on to call His first disciples, minister to the crowds, and then give His most well-known teaching; the Sermon on the Mount.

The Beatitudes describe how a follower of Jesus is to live in a world where the Kingdom of God is breaking in but has yet to fully establish its rule and reign. Jesus' words call us to position ourselves in a way that is reflective of His Kingdom and not our own. Before we can correct our posture, we must first take an honest look inward and see why it is that we follow Jesus in the first place. Matthew 4:23 tells us that Jesus was healing the sick and speaking in such a way that drew great crowds to Himself. However, these crowds were not interested in whole-heartedly following Jesus, they were interested in what they could receive from Him.

Whether it was to receive healing, an inspirational word, to fix a problem, or use Jesus to further their own agenda, the crowds and the disciples were interested in how Jesus could be a benefit to them. Jesus' words tell us that He isn't interested in being an additive to our lives or simply changing our circumstances, He wants to transform our whole being so that we might live in a way that is reflective of His goodness and sovereignty. To identify with His resurrection is to also identify with His crucifixion. If we are to follow Him faithfully, we must empty ourselves of this world and follow in the footsteps of Christ. During the next seven weeks, we will examine our lives in light of the Beatitudes so that we may turn from lesser things toward the greatest love we could ever treasure.

Reflection Questions

1. As you symbolically enter into the wilderness with Christ for this Lent season, take some time to identify the things that compete for your attention and tempt to pull you away from Him.

2. Why do you come to Jesus? Spend some time in prayer reflecting on your current posture and ask God what needs to change in order for you to be positioned in a way that desires to wholeheartedly follow Him.

Fasting: Food

Food could be fasting from a meal every day for the week, choosing a specific type of food to abstain from, or choosing to go without food from sunrise to sunset. Use this time of denying your physical needs to focus on your spiritual needs. You can spend that time in prayer, worship, reflection, etc. The purpose is not to focus on what we are missing out on but rather, in our weakness, turn to the One who is our true strength and source of life.

PRAYERS AND POEMS



I.

Father,

prepare my heart to identify with Christ.

Yes, He was beloved,
sought after and adored,
praised and worshiped,
celebrated and known.

But He was also rejected,
beaten and scorned,
mocked and despised,
hated and abandoned.

It's easy for me to identify with Your glory
and accompany You in Your blessings.
It's difficult for me to enter into Your mourning,
and follow You into Your sufferings.

Expose in me what I am truly after.
Expose in me my heart's deep desires.
In this season, prepare my heart to identify with Christ,
as He is in both His life and His death.
Amen.

II.

We live in a world filled with so many things,
readily available to grab for our attention,
and so many voices, eager to catch our ears.
There are a hundred ways to improve,
to grow,
to advance,
and an endless supply of self-help books ready to build our kingdom.

I don't want You to be just another resource at my disposal,
another thing I use to further my agenda,
another voice in the crowd,
another tool I dispose of when it no longer benefits me.

You are not to be used.
You are to be worshiped.

Father,
Posture me in such a way
that all of me is used to embrace all of You.
Amen.

III.

Any status I could earn,
Any earthly throne I could secure,
is just a shadow of the One who surpasses it all.

Father help me to come to You with open hands.
Amen.

WEEK 2

February 26 - March 4



POVERTY AND HUMILITY

Passage: Matthew 5:3

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Devotional

The type of poverty Jesus is describing here is a complete lack of resources, where there is a great need and yet no way of meeting that need. Jesus is saying that the Kingdom of Heaven is offered to those who know that their greatest need is God and admit that they have no way of getting to Him on their own. If we are going to have Jesus, He is going to have to come to us.

This concept is directly opposed to modern thinking. If you were to translate the world's values into a beatitude it would say something like "blessed are the self-sufficient, for they will be able to control their life" or "blessed are the famous and popular, for they will be admired by others." Being poor in spirit goes against everything that society would tell us otherwise. Admitting that you can't get by in life on your own doesn't sound like flourishing, it sounds like failing.

The reality is that our greatest need is God and we will never outgrow this need. We don't need to better ourselves in order to receive love and acceptance from God. God does not demand change before He offers us His love. Trying to "get better" on our own is like trying to clean up a mess with the same resources that created it in the first place. The proud will try to clothe themselves in their talents, achievements, and success but those who enter into the Kingdom are the ones clothed by the King Himself.

Reflection Questions

1. What kind of "beatitudes" do you live by that don't align with being "poor in spirit"?
2. In what ways do you attempt to cover up your vulnerabilities instead of allowing God to cover them?
3. Do you believe that your greatest need is God? What else in your life competes for that title?

Fasting: Caffeine/Beverages

Consider fasting from caffeine or other drinks besides water. If you have a morning routine centered around coffee or tea, try spending that time journaling about how the Lord is your strength and your portion. If you spend your evenings winding down with a warm drink, try spending that time thinking about how at the end of your days, Christ is the comfort you seek. You could consider putting aside the money that you would normally spend on those purchases and giving it towards a ministry or friend in need.

Hymn: Rock of Ages

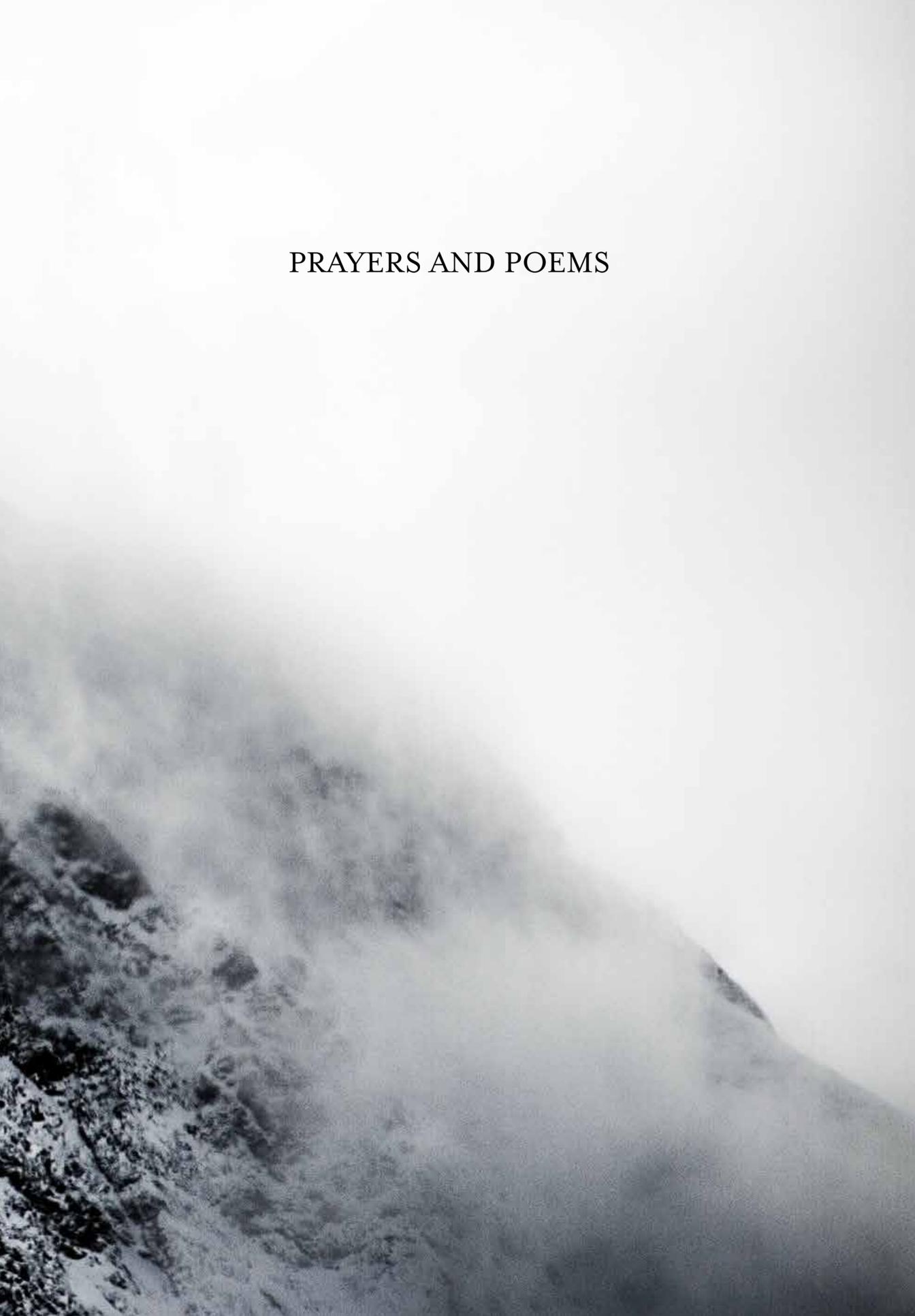
Rock of ages cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee
Rock of ages, cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee

Nothing in my hand I bring
Simply to Thy cross I cling
Nothing in my hand I bring
Simply to Thy cross I cling

Naked, come to Thee for dress
Helpless, look to Thee for grace
Vile, I to the fountain fly
Wash me, Savior, or I die

Rock of ages
Cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee
Rock of ages, cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee

PRAYERS AND POEMS



IV.

Father in Heaven,

What is it like to be You?

Full of knowledge and full of peace,
Overwhelming in power and abounding in grace.
You have all the resources to fix every problem
and all the patience to walk in wisdom.

I am growing tired of my limitations.
I do not have the strength to secure my own safety.
I do not have the power to provide all my needs.
I do not have the energy to fuel my exhaustion.
I do not have the answers to all the questions in my mind.

I am growing tired of living by faith,
trusting You to cover all that I cannot,
but I am more tired of trying to do things on my own.

Here I confess
that You are perfect and I am not,
that You are the Creator and I am Your creation.
that You are God and I yield to You.
Amen.

V.

You are my greatest need,
and I have no way of getting to You.

There is no strength I could gain,
no knowledge I could uncover,
no deed I could accomplish,
that would bridge the gap from me to You.

You are my greatest need,
and You must come to me.

Jesus,
Thank You for making a way to me.

VI.

All that I could ever offer,
all that I have to bring,
is just a shadow of the One this world longs for.

Father empty me and bring more of You.
Amen.



WEEK 3

March 5-11

MOURNING AND COMFORT

Passage: Matthew 5:4

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Devotional

Everyone suffers and everyone hurts, but not everyone mourns. To mourn in a way that receives comfort from the King is to be honest about what is broken apart from His Kingdom. As citizens of Heaven, our hearts break at the reality that the King is not yet fully on His throne. We are still waiting for His return in a broken world in need of restoration. When we carry our pain to God, confessing that things are not as they should be, we will find that He is eager to carry us.

When we mourn the loss of a loved one, it is evidence that we believe in a God who created mankind to live free from death. When we grieve over starvation, it upholds the belief that God made us to feast. When we are honest with our tears, it points to a God who made the world to be free from suffering. When we mourn in this way, it characterizes us as citizens of Heaven and marks us as those who belong to God.

The comfort we receive from God isn't a band-aid or a pat on the back. When we bring our hurts to God in a way that longs for His Kingdom, we will find the King who is eager to meet us. There is a day coming when He will right every wrong and wipe away every tear. Until that day comes, we will find a Savior who is with us through all of the grief, ready and willing to carry us through it all.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you typically handle your sufferings? Do you minimize or ignore your pain, assuring yourself and others that it's "not that bad?" Do you cover up your grief, putting your hope in a "mountain top" that might follow the valley? Do you excuse your hurts, assuring yourself that others have it worse so you should just be grateful? Do you idolize your wounds, allowing your grief to carry you through life as an identity?

2. What things in your life do you need to properly mourn? Spend some time bringing your pain to God.

Fasting: Sweets

Instead of turning towards sugar, try to taste and experience the sweetness of the Lord this week. When saying no to desert or removing your favorite candy from your house, fill those spaces with reminders about the reality of Christ's presence. Try putting up sticky notes to remind you of His nearness and His goodness. Ask God to reveal to you the joyful tenderness that He has to offer you during this time.

Hymn: He Will Hold Me Fast

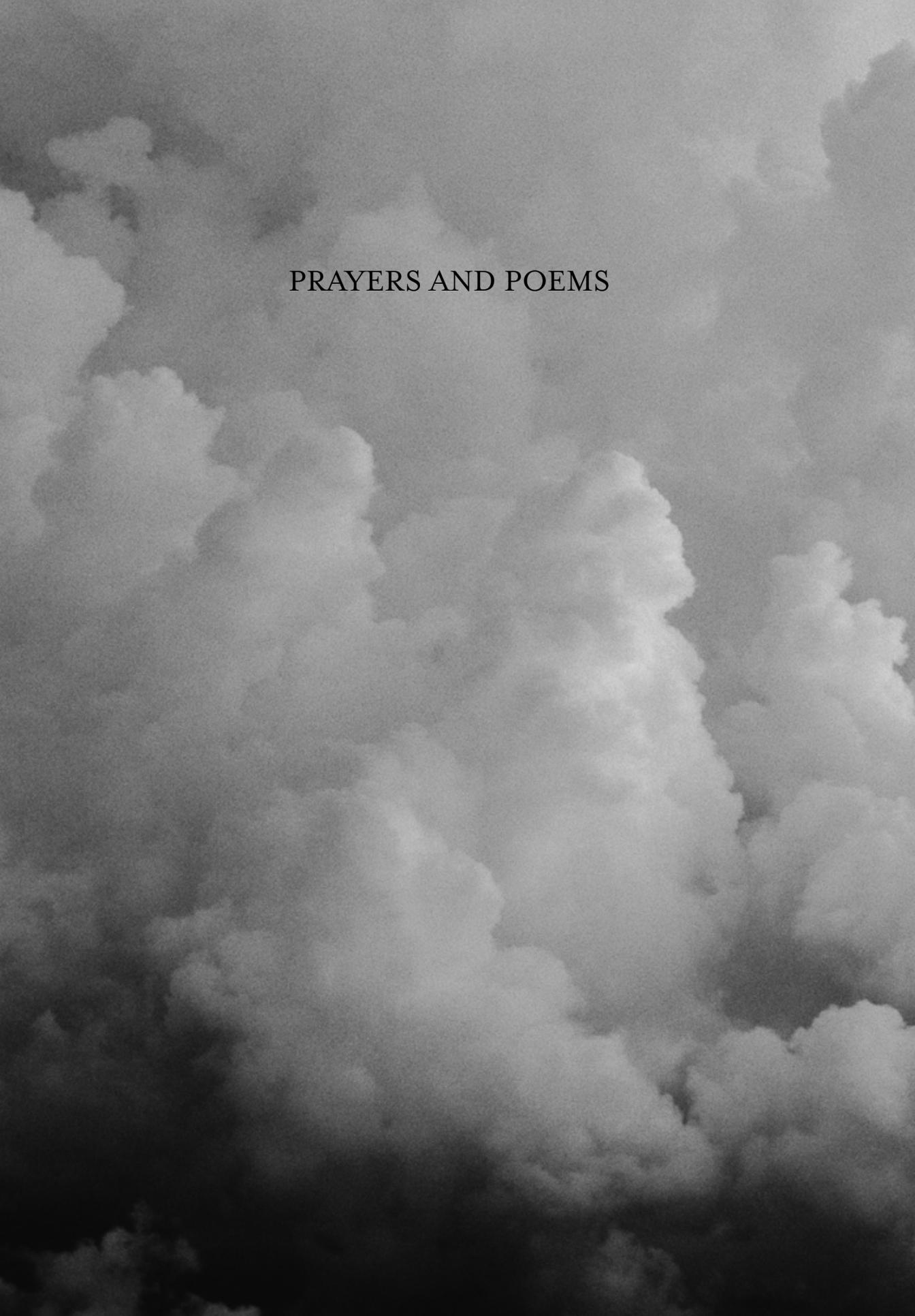
For my life He bled and died
Christ will hold me fast
Justice has been satisfied
He will hold me fast

Raised with Him to endless life
He will hold me fast
'Til our faith is turned to sight
When He comes at last

He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Savior loves me so
He will hold me fast

An Important Note

Some hurts create an emptiness that will never be filled in this lifetime and can be too overwhelming to tackle on our own. If you need help learning how to mourn, reach out to our Adult Ministries team at care@grace-bible.org. They would love to assist you with care or connect you to a counselor.



PRAYERS AND POEMS

VII.

How do I mourn?

How do I grieve?

I'm not quite sure I know what that means.

Is it sadness or sorrow?

Is it pain or fear?

Is it a heart that is crumbling under too much to bear?

This pain in my chest tells me the world is not right.

These tears in my eyes seem to block out Your light.

Was it me, O God, who caused all this hurt?

Or am I stuck in a suffering that I could not divert?

Was it You, Father, who allowed this to be?

Are my tears the result of a plan I cannot see?

So many questions,

so many thoughts.

Will there come a day when all this is forgot?

I don't know how to mourn,

and I don't know how to grieve.

But deep down I know this world was not made for me.

I was made for Heaven,

I was made for more.

Surely I was not made for pain, fear, or war.

Where are You Father in the midst of all this trial?

We're waiting for Your power, we're waiting for revival.

Teach me to hope, teach me to pray.

Give me the words when I don't know what to say.

I'm not in control and I'm not alright.

I need Your guidance and I need Your light.

Even in the tears,

even in the silence,

I know You are working and will give me Your guidance.

Help me to cry Your holy tears,

"Good and faithful servant" one day I will hear.

VIII.

It feels like Summer.

Though the leaves have changed color and some have fallen to the ground,
it still feels like Summer.

Though the cold front blew in and the sun hides behind the clouds,
it still feels like Summer.

Though the stores have set up decorations for all the festive holidays,
it still feels like Summer.

Though sweaters are out and warm drinks are made,
it still feels like Summer.

Though the rain pours down and a storm rolls through,
it still feels like Summer.

I know that the seasons have turned,
But the old still feels present in the new.

It may be Fall,
but the sun still beats me down.

It may be Winter,
but the heat still keeps rising.

It may be Spring,
But the humid air still chokes out my breath.

Summer has past,
But it still feels like Summer.

Your Kingdom is here, but yet still it is not.
Teach me how to live like the seasons have changed.

IX.

All that I could turn to,
Every escape I could find,
is just a shadow of the One who comforts my soul.

Father help me to bring my tears to You.
Amen.



WEEK 4

March 12-18

MEEKNESS AND GENTLENESS

Passage: Matthew 5:5

Blessed are the gentle, for they will inherit the earth.

Devotional

Here, meekness is best translated as gentleness or humility. Meekness isn't a trait that is held in high regard by society. Meekness will not ensure that your opinion is heard, or give you protection in hard pressed circumstances. Meekness is often seen as weakness rather than strength.

The word "meek" is used by Jesus in Matthew 11:28-29 when He is describing His own character as gentle and lowly. Jesus was both the most powerful and approachable man who has ever walked the earth. Jesus was not harsh or volatile, He did not shout or blatantly draw attention to Himself. He was always in a position of acceptance, with arms open to receive and grace ready to give. Jesus had the power to crush mankind, but rather He allowed Himself to be crushed in order to restore us. This is meekness on perfect display.

Jesus says that the meek will inherit the earth. The promised land that this original audience has been waiting for centuries will be given to them as an inheritance- something that is received through relationship rather than something that is achieved through their own power. Those who are meek do not try to earn something that God has promised to give. Those who are meek choose to put God's perfect power on display, rather than prove their power through their own strength and accomplishments. Blessed are those who are gentle and lowly, for they will receive what only God can give.

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways are you tempted to put your own strength on display rather than relying on Jesus' power and provision?
2. In what areas of your life do you struggle to encounter Jesus' gentle and lowly heart? (ie. areas that you feel ashamed of or disappointed in).

Fasting: Music and Podcasts

In this digital world, the practice of silence and solitude is hard to come by. This week, try taking a break from noise and instead grow in the practice of silence. You could use your car drive to pray instead of listening to the radio or spend time reciting or memorizing scripture. Instead of listening to music or a podcast, you could set aside time to sit in the stillness and practice listening to His voice more clearly.

Hymn: Be Thou My Vision

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best thought, by day or by night
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light

Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true word
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord
Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son
Thou in me dwelling and I with Thee one

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise
Thou mine inheritance, now and always
Thou and Thou only first in my heart
High King of Heaven, my treasure Thou art

PRAYERS AND POEMS



X.

You had the power to crush us,
yet You chose to be crushed instead.

You are not distant or detached,
You are near and invested.

You do not need us to accomplish Your sovereign plans,
yet You still call us and equip us.

You are Master and are worthy of our worship,
but yet You call us friend.

You are abundant in strength and might,
and overflowing with gentle humility.

You are King,
You are friend,
You are sovereign,
You are meek,
You are Father,
You are Son,
You are Protector,
You are Shepherd.

You had the power to crush us,
yet You chose to be crushed instead.

Thank you.

XI.

Father,

Too often I strive after securing my own place at the table.

I guard myself with armor, always ready to protect myself.

I am defensive and suspicious, closed off and invulnerable.

I fear being trampled over, used, or disregarded.

I found over the years that this world requires a strength that I do not have.

Anxiety is near, fear is at hand, paranoia and “what ifs” never cease.

Is this what it means to be my own protector?

You wish to be a shield around me.

You long to be my strength.

You are the source of all that I could not be
and have the strength this world needs.

I am afraid to release my control and to trust in You,

but I will never feel Your peace if I am working to secure my own.

Help me lay my walls down and embrace the shadow of Your wings.

Amen.

XII.

All the power I could find,

every shield I could create,

is just a shadow of the One who keeps me safe.

Father help me to rest in Your strength.

Amen.

An aerial, high-contrast black and white photograph of turbulent water. The water is dark and textured with ripples and small waves. A prominent white wake, likely from a boat, cuts through the water from the bottom left towards the center. The overall mood is dramatic and intense.

WEEK 5

March 19-25

HUNGER AND THIRST

Passage: Matthew 5:6 & 8

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Devotional

When we hunger and thirst for God, we find satisfaction. Yet when we hunger and thirst for satisfaction, we cannot find it. With our desires rightly ordered, we find ourselves living within God's design and are able to enjoy deep contentment in the good gifts that He gives. But it is all too easy to get distracted, and to prioritize the gifts over the Giver. So often we find ourselves rejoicing in the peace, satisfaction, and comfort that Christ brings rather than rejoicing in Christ himself. It is only when we love God most that we are truly able to love His world best.

To be pure in heart is to be single-minded in our devotions. Meaning, there is one thing that we would seek: to be in the house of the Lord and gaze upon His beauty all the days of our life (Psalm 27). Psalm 37:4 tells us that if we delight in the Lord He will give us the desires of our heart. If our desire is set wholly on the Lord, we will have all that we need and all that we want.

Maybe you read this and think "I'm a Christian, but sometimes, Jesus just isn't enough." While you're not alone in that and that can feel true on the surface, this perspective comes from a place of trying to use Jesus rather than know Jesus. When we make God into a product and try to use Him to get success, comfort, or happiness, He won't be enough. What do you do with products that don't work? You stop using them. You toss them away with all the other things in life that can't do as they're advertised. Jesus isn't a product, He's a person. He is God, but the whole reason He came to earth and took on flesh was so that He could be with us. There is a day coming when the radiance of our Savior will be enough and all the problems of this world will fade away. Anxiety, depression, fear, worry, and sorrow will all be healed. But until then, the presence of our Savior in the midst of our pain is more than enough. To know Jesus, to experience His closeness and His tenderness, will far surpass any product we could find. Blessed are those who desire God, for they will find all that they could need and have all that they could want.

Reflection Questions

1. Are your desires rightly ordered? Is love for God first in your life, or do His gifts take the primary seat of your affections?
2. What keeps you from hungering and thirsting for righteousness? What are some ways you can cultivate a greater love for God in your life?

Fasting: Media

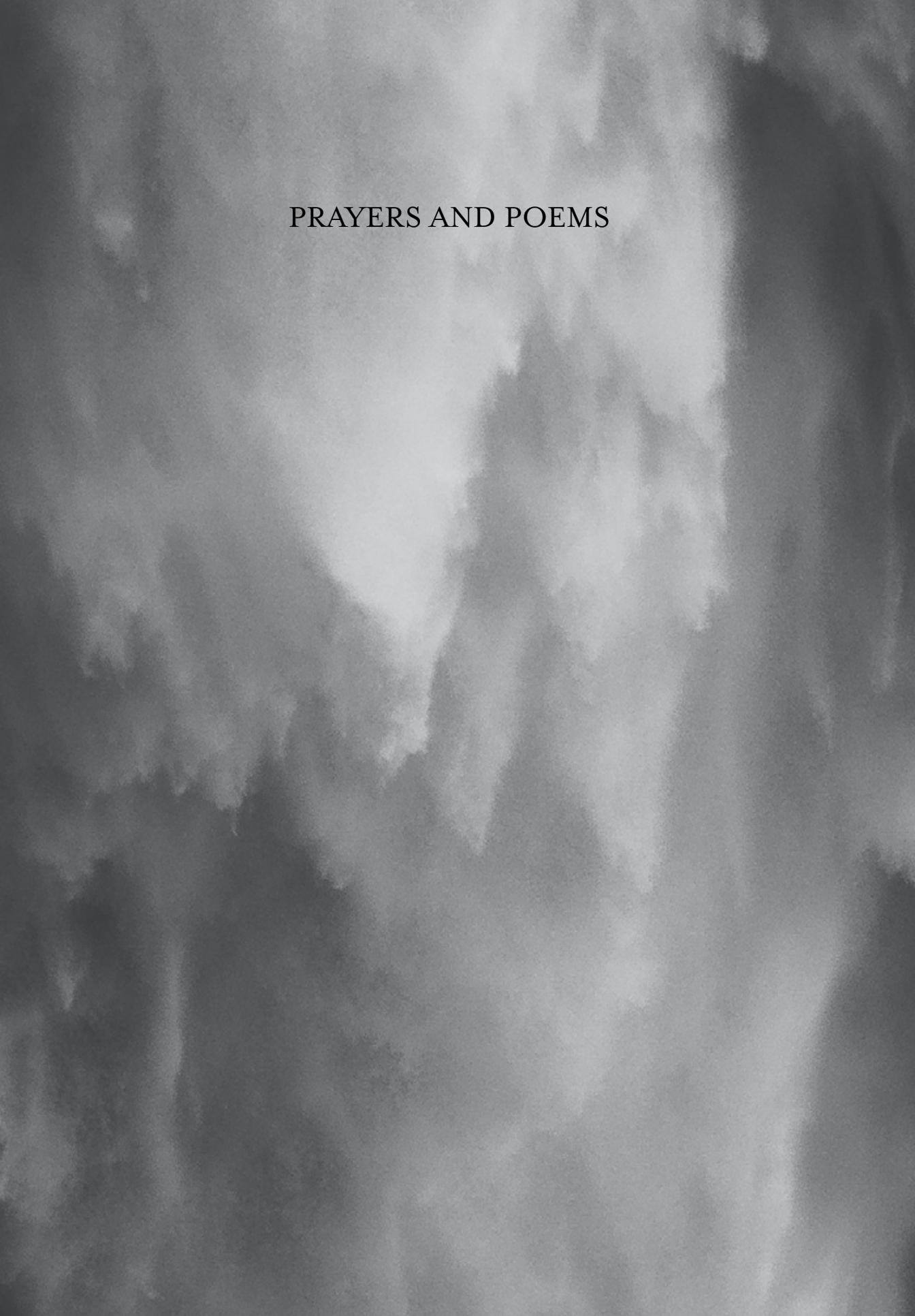
It's so easy to compare our lives to the square snapshot we see of others on our phones. Who's traveling, whose marriage is doing better than ours, who's further along in their career, who seems to be able to effortlessly accomplish what we consistently fall short at? If we aren't careful, media can turn into the avenue we use to compare how we're doing in our pursuit of happiness to those around us. This week, unplug the TV, let the battery on the devices hit zero, and allow that time to turn your hearts towards Christ. Time that is normally spent watching a show or scrolling on social media can instead be used to soak in the presence of Jesus. Fast from whatever type of media that grabs for your attention—such as social media, video games, TV, movies, Internet, etc. Consider spending time as a family or as roommates going through scripture together or spending that time in prayer.

Hymn: Better Is One Day

How lovely is Your dwelling place
Oh, Lord Almighty
For my soul longs and even faints for You
For here my heart is satisfied
Within Your presence
I sing beneath the shadow of Your wings

One thing I ask and I would seek
To see Your beauty
To find You in the place Your glory dwells

Better is one day in Your courts
Better is one day in Your house
Better is one day in Your courts
Than thousands elsewhere

A black and white photograph of a dramatic, cloudy sky. The clouds are dark and textured, with a bright light source breaking through the center, creating a strong contrast and illuminating the surrounding clouds. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

PRAYERS AND POEMS

XIII.

Father,

I am blind.

Blind to the goodness that surrounds me.

My schedule gets filled with things to do and tasks to accomplish.

The bills need to be paid and things need to be fixed.

I am too busy to see You move

and too distracted to hear Your small still voice.

With a closet filled with clothes,

a pantry overriden with food,

a calendar booked with meetings,

a house stuffed with clutter,

breaks won over with scrolling,

and time given to distraction,

I have no room for You.

It's not that You are not beautiful,

but that I cannot even see You.

It's not that You are not enough,

but that I don't have space to be fulfilled by You.

Father,

Make space in my life to be captivated by You.

Amen.

XIV.

You tell me I am a new creation,
but deep down
what I seek
is not Your will.

My hands reach for things out of its grasp.
My feet wander far from Your nearness.
My eyes search for things out of focus.
My ears listen only to what they want to hear.
My mouth speaks of things that are only to my interest.
My mind contemplates all it should not consider.
My energy goes to what does not bring You glory.
My desires crave cheap food even when I am in the presence of a rich feast.

Father I confess
That even though I am a new creation,
I don't feel very new.
I need You to help me love You as I should.

XV.

All that I could ever have,
all that I could ever find,
is just a shadow of the One my soul longs for.

Father help me to long for You.
Amen.



WEEK 6

March 26 - April 1

MERCY AND PEACE

Passage: Matthew 5:7 & 9

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Devotional

We are not required to be merciful with others in order to receive mercy from Jesus. However, treating others with grace and kindness is the evidence of someone who understands the mercy, they, themselves have received. God cares about how we treat people because it says something about who we are and who He is. When we enter into conflict with others and find reconciliation, the Father's heart is put on display. When we respond to hostility with peace, we are reflecting the Kingdom of God. We belong to a peacemaking God who took all the hostility of the world upon Himself as He died on the cross. When we act as peacemakers in this world, we are reinforcing the heart of our Savior and displaying the world of perfect peace that is to come. To be uninterested in extending mercy to those in need or to refrain from entering into the brokenness around us does not reflect the heart of someone who has received much. To be a peacemaker is to allow Jesus to lay claim over all of our bitterness, resentment, and hurts. Let the reality of all that you have received put into perspective how you should enter into trying and difficult spaces.

Reflection Questions

1. When you are faced with difficult situations, is your desire to display God's peacemaking heart or to pursue your own self-interest? How so?
2. We are often called to extend mercy to those who are in need and forgiveness to those who frustrate us. Where is God calling you to be a peacemaker?
3. Recall the ways God has been merciful to you in the past and in the present.

Fasting: Shopping

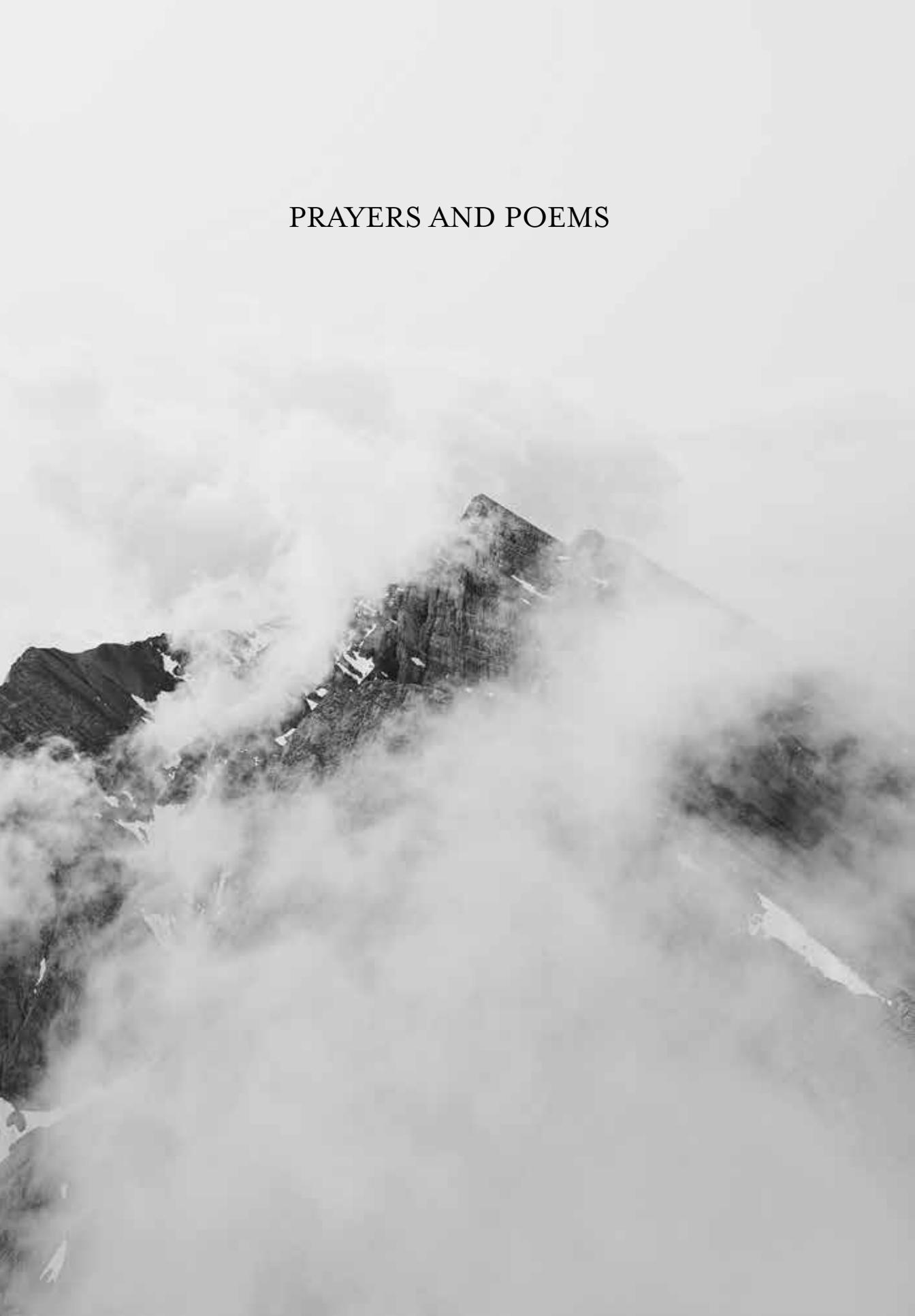
Consider committing to only purchasing essentials this week. It's easy to fill up our lives with comforts and personal wants- none of those things are inherently wrong. But this week, try focusing on how God fulfills your every need. You could make a list of all the things you are hesitant in trusting the Lord with and spend time in prayer bringing those to Him, asking Him to show you His goodness and faithfulness. Whenever you feel the pull of making a nonessential purchase, remind yourself of how God is more than enough for you. Another option would be taking the money that you would normally spend on a nonessential purchase and instead using it to be a blessing to others and give to someone else in need.

Hymn: In Need, Written by Ross King

In need of grace, in need of love
In need of mercy raining down from high above
In need of strength, in need of peace
In need of things that only You can give to me

In need of Christ, the perfect Lamb
My refuge strong, the great I Am
This is my song, my humble plea
I am Your child, I am in need

PRAYERS AND POEMS



XVI.

Father,

I confess,

that deep in my heart,

I do not want to forgive.

I have been hurt.

I have been used.

I have been looked over and forgotten.

The last thing I wish to do is to give to others what they have not given to me.

I know I am wrong,

and I know that's not how You work,

but I am struggling to view grace as You do.

Remind me of all that I have been given,

and teach me to have a mindset of abundance.

Show me how You have covered my hurts.

Remind me that You do not desire to simply use me.

Seek me and find me, help me to feel known.

I confess that I do not want to forgive,

but deep in my heart,

I want to want to forgive.

From a place of having much, I know I can give to others.

Thank You for Your grace,

help me to extend it to others.

Amen.

XVII.

Your mercy gives me confidence.

Your mercy is a light unto my feet.

Your mercy is a safe place.

Your mercy is my covering.

Your mercy will strengthen me.

Your mercy is sufficient.

Your mercy is my rescue.

Your mercy will be heard.

Your mercy is my hope.

Your mercy cannot be outrun.

Your mercy cannot be overdrawn.

Your mercy is the one thing that I need.

XVIII.

Any peace I could create,

Every mercy I could extend,

is just a shadow of the One who has paid it all.

Father help me to receive and to share Your mercy.

Amen.



WEEK 7

April 2-8

PERSECUTION AND SUFFERING

Passage: Matthew 5: 10-12

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in Heaven is great; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Devotional

Persecution isn't just for missionaries or the spiritual "elite". A student is not above their teacher- if our Savior faced persecution, so shall we. This doesn't mean we seek out persecution or aim to create it, but rather that when persecution arises, we wouldn't run away from it. To live a life avoiding this is to follow Christ only when it benefits us in some way. Following Jesus isn't about being accepted by others, being liked, or being comfortable. The kindest and most gentle person that ever lived was persecuted unto death. When we pursue being liked by everyone around us and seek to dwell in the safest or most convenient places, we are missing out on a key piece of the Kingdom.

This type of persecution is for righteousness' sake. It's not for a political opinion or just general suffering. Not every trial we face in our lives will qualify as persecution. To be persecuted for righteousness' sake is to face adversity and hostility when we act or speak in a way that points to the Kingdom of Heaven. It is being a witness to the word of God even if and especially when we will be ostracized for it. We can rejoice in these moments because to know Christ is to share in His sufferings which brings us closer to Him. This does not mean we seek out adversity or deal harshly with those whose beliefs differ from ours, but rather that we would press in even if others push back.

Reflection Questions

1. What, if anything, would cause you to turn away from Jesus instead of following Him in obedience?
2. What fears or frustrations do you have that keep you from being a faithful witness of Christ? Are there certain scenarios or situations that you avoid the most?

Fasting: Sleep

For this last week, try either getting up an hour earlier or staying up an hour later and devote that time to prayer. You are not expected to abstain from sleep for the whole week, but rather that you would use this time of sacrificing an early morning or a late night to connect with God in the stillness of confession, repentance, thanksgiving, and praise.

Hymn: Jesus Paid It All

Lord, now indeed I find
Thy power and thine alone
Can change the lepers spots
And melt the heart of stone

Jesus paid it all
All to him I owe
Sin had left a crimson stain
He washed it white as snow

And when before the throne
I stand in him complete
Jesus died my soul to save
My lips shall still repeat

Jesus paid it all
All to him I owe
Sin had left a crimson stain
He washed it white as snow

PRAYERS AND POEMS



XIX.

What's the good life?
It's filled with ease and comfort,
peace and calm,
silence and solitude,
not much can go wrong.

What's the good life?
There's no fighting or arguing,
no political affairs,
no shouting or blocking,
no boats to rock or feathers to ruffle.

What's the good life?
It's closing the blinds,
shutting the door,
building a fence,
and sweeping things under the rug.

Is this the good life?
Is this what it is?
Or is this my attempt to fit You inside
the boundaries of my fears
and the constructs of my comfort?

Help me to break open the box that I put You in.
Help me to step into Your good life.

XX.

Father,

You have given everything for me and yet I am hesitant to give everything for You.

I am fearful to speak up,

I am afraid of being looked down upon,

I don't want to be ostracized,

I resist being left out.

I confess that I long for acceptance more than I long for Your Kingdom.

I confess that I feel I am not equipped to share Your good news.

What do I say?

What if I don't know how to respond?

I don't want to feel like I am not enough.

Yet Your Word is clear,

Your call is simple.

You gave Yourself, even unto death,

so that all might know You.

Give me boldness to speak of what is true.

Give me courage to face my fears.

Give me Your nearness to supply all that I need.

Amen.

XXI.

Any acceptance I could obtain,

all the favor I could ever receive,

is just a shadow of the One who is worth it all.

Father help me to live for You.

Amen.

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