



DIARY  
*of*  
DAILEY  
PRAYER

SECOND EDITION

J. BARRIE  
SHEPHERD

DIARY OF DAILY PRAYER  
*Second Edition*



DIARY OF DAILY PRAYER  
*Second Edition*



J. Barrie Shepherd

**WJK** WESTMINSTER  
JOHN KNOX PRESS  
LOUISVILLE • KENTUCKY

© 2002 J. Barrie Shepherd

Originally published in 1975 by Augsburg Publishing House

*All rights reserved.* No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address Westminster John Knox Press, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396.

Scripture quotations unless otherwise noted are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, 1971, and 1973 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission.

*Book design by Sharon Adams*  
*Cover design by Pam Poll Graphic Design*

Published by Westminster John Knox Press  
Louisville, Kentucky

This book is printed on acid-free paper that meets the American National Standards Institute Z39.48 standard. ☺

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11 — 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Shepherd, J. Barrie.

Diary of daily prayer / J. Barrie Shepherd.— 2nd ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-664-22565-9

1. Prayers. I. Title.

BV245 .S5 2002  
242'.2—dc21

2001040850



*I dedicate this book to the five women in my life:  
Mhairi, my wife, and Alison, Fiona, Nicola, and Catriona,  
my four daughters. I do so in gratitude for many things,  
but especially for a growing sensitivity  
to the subtly powerful ways in which the language we use  
excludes the feminine experience, the female world.  
In this book I have tried to avoid the all-too-typical use  
of specific male words as generic terms to cover both sexes.  
At times I have failed. In other places I leave unresolved questions,  
such as my repeated use of “Father” as the most intimate address  
for God. I have tried. I leave it to others to further the attempt.  
And I am grateful to all those who inspired it in my life.*



## CONTENTS

Preface		ix
About This Book		xi
DAY ONE.	Morning: <i>Miracles</i>	3
	Evening: <i>Relaxing</i>	5
DAY TWO.	Morning: <i>Your tolerance</i>	7
	Evening: <i>Honest gratitude</i>	9
DAY THREE.	Morning: <i>My body</i>	11
	Evening: <i>Friends</i>	13
DAY FOUR.	Morning: <i>Journey</i>	15
	Evening: <i>Noontime and evening</i>	17
DAY FIVE.	Morning: <i>For peace</i>	19
	Evening: <i>Time-out</i>	21
DAY SIX.	Morning: <i>Being a Christian</i>	23
	Evening: <i>People</i>	25
DAY SEVEN.	Morning: <i>Success</i>	27
	Evening: <i>Seeking and finding</i>	29
DAY EIGHT.	Morning: <i>With me, Lord</i>	31
	Evening: <i>Your mysteries</i>	33
DAY NINE.	Morning: <i>Listening</i>	35
	Evening: <i>Review</i>	37
DAY TEN.	Morning: <i>Manna</i>	39
	Evening: <i>Stretching</i>	41
DAY ELEVEN.	Morning: <i>In the world</i>	43
	Evening: <i>Those around me</i>	45
DAY TWELVE.	Morning: <i>First and last</i>	47
	Evening: <i>Idle chatter</i>	49
DAY THIRTEEN.	Morning: <i>Easing pressure</i>	51
	Evening: <i>Myself, yourself</i>	53
DAY FOURTEEN.	Morning: <i>Fool</i>	55
	Evening: <i>Aging</i>	57
DAY FIFTEEN.	Morning: <i>Escape</i>	59
	Evening: <i>Demand and invitation</i>	61

DAY SIXTEEN.	Morning: <i>Providence</i>	63
	Evening: <i>Testing</i>	65
DAY SEVENTEEN.	Morning: <i>Incarnation</i>	67
	Evening: <i>Opening</i>	69
DAY EIGHTEEN.	Morning: <i>Your family</i>	71
	Evening: <i>Security</i>	73
DAY NINETEEN.	Morning: <i>Dreaming</i>	75
	Evening: <i>Strength in weakness</i>	77
DAY TWENTY.	Morning: <i>My mind</i>	79
	Evening: <i>For our riches</i>	81
DAY TWENTY-ONE.	Morning: <i>Abraham</i>	83
	Evening: <i>Your day</i>	85
DAY TWENTY-TWO.	Morning: <i>Weather report</i>	87
	Evening: <i>Word power</i>	89
DAY TWENTY-THREE.	Morning: <i>Conflict</i>	91
	Evening: <i>Night people</i>	93
DAY TWENTY-FOUR.	Morning: <i>Blood</i>	95
	Evening: <i>Food</i>	97
DAY TWENTY-FIVE.	Morning: <i>Defense</i>	99
	Evening: <i>Strangers</i>	101
DAY TWENTY-SIX.	Morning: <i>The dance</i>	103
	Evening: <i>Resting</i>	105
DAY TWENTY-SEVEN.	Morning: <i>Simple things</i>	107
	Evening: <i>Prodigals</i>	109
DAY TWENTY-EIGHT.	Morning: <i>Rebirth</i>	111
	Evening: <i>Judging</i>	113
DAY TWENTY-NINE.	Morning: <i>Children</i>	115
	Evening: <i>Thanks</i>	117
FOR SUNDAY.	Morning: <i>Our day</i>	119
	Evening: <i>Worship now</i>	121

## PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

Some twenty-five years ago and more, this little book first saw the light of day. Its official publication date was to be in early 1975, but one of the very first printed copies was rushed to me—"hot off the press"—in mid-December 1974, so that it could be home in Scotland, in my parents' hands, in time for Christmas. My parents are now both long gone, but that memory revives in me a deep sense of gratitude for their loving nurture, and for all they did that encouraged in me whatever gifts I may have received.

As happens with almost all books—including many of my own—the time came when *Diary of Daily Prayer* went out of print, and before long even the few copies I held in my personal stock were exhausted. Yet at speaking engagements, teaching assignments, General Assemblies, and other such gatherings of the faithful across the intervening years, I received continuing requests for copies of the book, and/or inquiries about where copies might be obtained. So many people have spoken and written to me about their own use of the blank pages provided to form their personal prayer diaries and journals. Some have even sent me samplings from those pages. From time to time I have also been surprised, usually in worship settings, to hear someone reading excerpts from the book, and have been astonished at its continuing vitality and its ability to address the here and now with both insight and grace. (I hesitate, naturally, to apply such words to my own writing, and do so only in the firm conviction that all is, and has been, a gift—a gift generously given, and freely to be shared.)

In view of all this I was both honored, and delighted, when Westminster John Knox Press expressed interest in presenting a Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition of this, my first published work. Even though the publication date has now lagged a little beyond the actual anniversary, I still rejoice in the lives that have been touched and blessed over the years by the words and thoughts set down here, and in this opportunity to extend that ministry over the next few years. My prayer is now, as it was back then, that these words of mine may clear the way for silence, that deepest silence into which the living Word may speak yet again, and speaking create light in darkness, new life from dusty death.



## ABOUT THIS BOOK

As an undergraduate at The University of Edinburgh, I managed to attend a graduate-level seminar at New College. The topic was “Prayer,” and the instructor, the late John Baillie. As the bell rang, a dry, wrinkled stick of a man in a teaching robe slowly entered the room. He approached the podium, cleared his throat, and proceeded to address the class in a voice as young and vibrant as a June morning in the Scottish Highlands. I do not recall much of what he said but, for me, Baillie embodied the very spirituality we had come to learn about. I learned that prayer is not greatly concerned with words; it is a matter of life lived in the presence of the Lord.

This volume is arranged in the form of a diary, somewhat along the lines of John Baillie’s classic little book, *Diary of Private Prayer*. It goes without saying that Baillie’s work will never be replaced, or superseded. However, if my book can supplement what he achieved, or, better still, continue his attempt to provide a series of launching points for the essentially private, essentially personal event of prayer, I will be more than satisfied. It is to that purpose that space has been provided each day for the addition of individual petitions, intercessions, confessions, and exclamations of praise. This is not only my diary. If used to the full, it becomes a truly personal Diary of Prayer for each reader.

The reader may notice that many of the prayers contain more implicit than fully explicit references to Jesus, the Christ. This characteristic springs from a conviction that the traditional formula of ending every prayer with a specific reference to Christ—as if by affixing such a seal one assures a speedy and favorable hearing from the Lord—is not necessary, and may even encourage the loose and empty use of the name of our Lord. It also expresses my belief that God hears the earnest prayers of all persons, whether or not they name the name of Christ in every prayer. Where such explicit references are appropriate to the content of the prayer, they are made. However, just as much of Jesus’ own claim about himself was made, not directly, in explicit proclamation of his divine status, but indirectly, through the parables, rhetorical questions, symbolic actions, and eloquent silences of his life and ministry, just so is he present in these prayers—quietly, gently, often unnamed, but always there, at the heart.

One final word: These prayers are designed to form a dialogue. Silence should have a part in every one of them—the waiting silence that listens for the Word of the Lord. Rather than try to predetermine the place of silence in each prayer, I have left it to the discretion of the reader. All I ask is that my book may claim a space for listening as well as for speaking, for waiting upon the Lord, as well as for calling upon his name.

DIARY OF DAILY PRAYER  
*Second Edition*



DAY ONE

*Miracles*

In an age of miracles, O God,  
 when the horizons of the planets  
 are displayed in our morning newspapers,  
 and folk take routine walks in the vacuum of space,  
 in an age of miracles,  
 I come to you in search of a miracle.

I come because,  
 despite its spectacular achievements,  
 this is also the age of anxiety.  
 And I am deeply anxious.

I come because,  
 despite the mind-expanding times in which I live,  
 these are also times of confusion, loneliness,  
 and the loss of meaning.  
 And I am profoundly confused.

In these quiet morning moments, Lord,  
 speak to me of your own miracle,  
 the miracle of love.  
 Perform, here and now, within me  
 the miracle of forgiveness, of renewal,  
 of life out of death.  
 Set before my eyes  
 the entire miraculous spectrum of your creation,  
 the infinite majesty of your universe,  
 the fathomless mystery of your atom,  
 the boundless possibility of the human spirit.

Then send me forth this day,  
 to bear these miracles to the heart  
 of an otherwise spectacularly empty world.

DAY ONE

*Relaxing*

Father, so often I fail  
 to find you in my praying,  
 despite all my best efforts.  
 I enter grimly into prayer,  
 trying to gather up all my wandering thoughts  
 and suppress them, control them for you.  
 I seek your presence, Lord,  
 attempting to clear my mind of all possible distractions,  
 all conceivable interruptions.  
 Yet, no matter how I concentrate,  
 my thoughts thread their way back  
 to the business of my daily life and work.  
 Am I so wrong in this, Lord?  
 Surely if these are the things that concern me,  
 the matters around which my life revolves,  
 then they should form the content of my prayers.  
 When will I learn that prayers  
 are not time set aside from life,  
 reserved for thinking pure and holy thoughts,  
 but prayer is a lifelong dialogue with you  
 concerning all that is important in my life?

Help me, now,  
 not to concentrate,  
 but rather to relax.  
 Convince me that I cannot raise myself  
 into your holy presence by sheer determination,  
 that you are always already here,  
 and all I have to do  
 is to open myself to your presence.  
 Help me  
 to be myself  
 in my praying, Lord.

DAY TWO



*Your tolerance*

For this new day of promise and possibility, Lord,  
I want to praise you not only with my lips,  
but with my living.

Teach me to share this day with others  
in a true spirit of celebration, openness, and grace.  
In every hour preserve me  
from the smooth and easy answers of intolerance.  
Deny to me, Father, the idle luxury  
of venting my frustrations and rage  
upon the usual, carefully selected scapegoats.  
Help me to recognize within my own heart  
all the potential for racism and bigotry,  
for blind violence, brutality, and repression,  
that I am so swift to point out in others.  
And let me see that this inner potential finds  
its most immediate, and perhaps its most destructive  
expression in the scorn and contempt I reserve  
for those who dare to disagree with me.  
Teach me to value all with whom I spend my time  
as fellow human beings,  
your precious gifts to me this day.  
Fill me with *your* tolerance—  
no empty, indiscriminating acceptance of everything,  
rather a difficult, testing tolerance,  
a tolerance that combines  
a basic, non-negotiable respect for all individuals  
with a self-sacrificing quest for justice and truth.

Above all, Father, fill me with the one power  
that can bring people together by attraction,  
and not by compulsion—the power of your love.  
In that power may I spend my self  
in healing, in reconciling,  
in binding up this splintered world.

DAY TWO

*Honest gratitude*

Gratitude is a difficult emotion, Father.  
 So often I am told to thank you  
 for food and clothing, health and strength,  
 the beauty of nature, the privilege of freedom,  
 but I don't really feel grateful.  
 I go through the motions of thanks, nothing more.

Yet, when I consider,  
 there *are* many things for which I am thankful.  
 I thank you, Lord,  
 for moments of inspiration,  
 flashes of joy, glimpses of truth.  
 I thank you for the hidden strengths  
 that carry me through the stresses of each hour.  
 I thank you for peace and relaxation  
 at the close of a hard day's work,  
 for grace that surprises me, now and then,  
 in the midst of living, and transforms it for an instant,  
 for the comfort, and frankness, and joy  
 of a few real friends.  
 I am grateful too, Lord.  
 that you have not abandoned me  
 to my own vanity, conceit, and prejudice,  
 but have kept nagging away at the back of my mind  
 with hard choices, testing decisions,  
 the constant challenge, in all that I do,  
 to find my life in losing it.

Most of all I thank you for Jesus Christ,  
 who opened himself to the utmost  
 that I might see true life in him,  
 fully lived out, and fully died out.  
 For his life risen and living in me this night,  
 I thank you, Father, and rejoice.

DAY THREE

*My body*

Sometimes when I awaken,  
 it is as if I am returning to my body, Lord.  
 What is this thing that I call “my body”?  
 Is it something that I own, Father,  
 like “my house,” or “my car”?  
 Could it be something I relate to,  
 like “my wife,” “my child,” “my parents”?  
 Do I *own* my body? Or *am* I my body?  
 Is it I who demand daily food and shelter,  
 comfort, tenderness, sexual expression,  
 recreation, rest, and relaxation?  
 Or is it “only my body” that needs such things?  
 Is my body flabby and in need of discipline,  
 or am I?  
 Who gets sick, my body, or myself?  
 And just who is growing old at such a speed?  
 Yes, Lord, at times, language makes things  
 much more difficult to comprehend.

Teach me, Father, to know myself  
 as a unity of both body and spirit.  
 Help me to grow into a fuller self-awareness,  
 an awareness in which I recognize myself as a person,  
 a person who is a body,  
 a body who is more than flesh and bone and blood.

Help me to accept the mystery of my own self,  
 a body formed by your hands, enlivened by your breath.  
 And thus may I accept my body,  
 all its strengths, all its flaws.  
 May I be my body,  
 and in so doing be also your creation,  
 the living being you molded me to be,  
 the new creation that you shaped with your own  
 flesh and blood in Jesus Christ, my Lord.

DAY THREE

*Friends*

Friends were with me today, Lord,  
 people I love,  
 and who love me,  
 people I trust,  
 and who trust me,  
 people I enjoy being with,  
 no matter where, or how, or why.  
 Friends were with me today.

I thank you for my friends  
 and for all they bring to my living.  
 For the way they give of themselves to me,  
 for the way they help me give of myself,  
 and even be myself, and more than myself,  
 I give you my deepest thanks, Father.  
 I thank you, Lord, for the simple  
 but real kinds of support,  
 and comfort, and strength I can draw  
 from my friends.

But most of all I thank you  
 for the ways in which you reveal yourself  
 to me through friendship,  
 for all of the moments in which,  
 through frail but wonderful human instruments,  
 you sing to me of grace and mercy,  
 of the risk of commitment  
 and the challenge of response,  
 of the strong, sure knowledge of acceptance  
 in the heart of a true friend,  
 in the heart of a true father,  
 in your heart, my God and my Redeemer.

Grant me now a restful night,  
 the grace to rise refreshed tomorrow,  
 and the faith to be a friend to all I meet.

DAY FOUR



*Journey*

Another day begins, Lord,  
 another journey—dawn to dusk—  
 in the voyage of discovery we call “life.”  
 As I set out, I pause to ask your blessing,  
 your guidance along the way,  
 your welcome when I reach my destination.

Grant me this day  
 the smile of a song upon my lips,  
 the lilt of lively companionship along the road,  
 the wisdom to see the way ahead and hold to it,  
 the strength and courage to overcome all obstacles,  
 and the openness to share these gifts  
 with all whose way is tangled and obscure.

Do not permit me, Father,  
 to wander from the route,  
 mazing myself in the circling paths of selfishness,  
 straying with the pride  
 that always seems to dog my footsteps.  
 But also, Lord, do not allow me  
 to travel with such intense concentration on the goal  
 that I cannot take the time  
 to enjoy the wonders along the way,  
 the tiny, everyday marvels that call on me  
 to stop a while, and celebrate,  
 and praise you for the journey  
 as well as for the destination.

And when I reach the journey’s end,  
 grant me safe lodging,  
 loved ones to greet me,  
 and a place to rest and be with you again.

DAY FOUR

*Noontime and evening*

In the calm, relaxed quietness  
of this evening hour  
you are telling me something, Lord,  
something about the frenzy,  
the hectic, panicked pace  
of life at noontime.

For, despite all the crises,  
all the impossible demands,  
the unmeetable assignments,  
the inhuman deadlines  
of the heat of the day,  
somehow, evening always comes,  
the tempo slows down,  
and those decisions at noon  
can be reviewed  
in the cool, clear light  
of eternity.

Let the peace of evening become  
so much a part of me,  
and me a part of it, Lord,  
that I can take it with me  
into the working day tomorrow.  
Let me store this peace away, now,  
at the back of my mind,  
the roots of my soul,  
and then bring it out,  
even momentarily,  
when all seems lost and hopeless.

Thus grant me, Father,  
to share a little here and now,  
in the vision,  
the experience, of eternity.

DAY FIVE

*For peace*

I awaken to the early morning peace,  
 and I praise you, Lord, for the promise of the morning.  
 In this new day  
 let my desire for peace  
 become something more than  
 a fond hope, a plaintive song,  
 an emotional high, a political slogan,  
 a patch on my blue jeans.  
 Let the reality of peace,  
 all of its rich connotations—  
 wholeness and concern,  
 cooperation, selflessness, communion—  
 take root and grow within me.

May I take peace behind the wheel of my automobile,  
 peace into the supermarket,  
 discount store, and coffee shop.  
 May peace be with me in my workplace,  
 setting the boundaries, determining the textures  
 of all my words and actions.  
 As I break bread with my family and friends,  
 may that bread become a sacrament of peace.  
 If I should differ and dispute with those around me,  
 may I differ within the overarching context  
 of that basic regard for the dignity of all your children  
 which is at the heart of all true peace, Lord.

So let this active,  
 all-encompassing power of peace  
 become the source and the goal of all of my living.  
 And thus, may I know something  
 of that peculiar blessedness you have promised  
 to all true peacemakers  
 through the Prince of Peace.

DAY FIVE

*Time-out*

Eternal and ever-living God,  
 I come before you this evening  
 out of a passionate concern for time,  
 the value, the urgency, the lack of time.

I need time, Lord, time to work a little harder,  
 earn a little extra, get ahead of the game.  
 I need time, Lord, time to spend at home,  
 live like a family, do things together.  
 I need time, Lord, time to get involved  
 in the struggles for justice, equality, and freedom for all.  
 What is this gift you give me, Father,  
 this time that runs through the fingers  
 like sand whenever I try to get a hold on it?  
 Yet sand can be beautiful, even bountiful,  
 handful after handful—sifting into the wind—  
 endless, timeless, eternal sand.

In this moment of calm, Lord, teach me  
 about time and sand.  
 Teach me about quality rather than quantity of time.  
 Help me to see that I do have time,  
 the minutes of every hour, the hours of all the days,  
 time—time enough—and more,  
 time filled up and running over.  
 Time to be, time to live, to love and serve.  
 Time to die—to die to self—to die for others.  
 Time, even, to begin to relinquish time,  
 to cling, not quite so desperately, to minute after minute.  
 Time to look at, to contemplate timelessness.

God, for time I thank you,  
 for the days and years of my life.  
 I offer them to you now, that of their minutes and hours  
 you may weave a richly hued eternity,  
 here and now, and forevermore.

DAY SIX



*Being a Christian*

Today, Lord Jesus,  
 I will be given the opportunity  
 to name myself a Christian once again,  
 to decide for you, or against you,  
 in every action, every word I speak,  
 every attitude I represent.  
 Today I will be called once more  
 to claim my citizenship in heaven, or in hell,  
 to exist under the authority of your love,  
 or under the tyranny  
 of my own protectiveness and pride.

Minute by minute,  
 hour by hour, I will know  
 the challenge to place my trust in you,  
 and you alone.  
 Each encounter, every decision,  
 even the most thoughtless  
 and incidental of acts will demonstrate  
 just who is really my Savior and Lord.  
 In every relationship,  
 at work, in school, on the street, on the road,  
 the choice will be there: to live your life for others,  
 or to live my own life for myself.

Be with me  
 in all of this day's moments, Father,  
 and grant me that gift  
 without which I cannot survive,  
 the gift of your gracious saving power,  
 working in me,  
 through me,  
 even despite me,  
 all things together for good.

DAY SIX

*People*

People throng my mind this evening, Father,  
people with whom I have spent this day.

I recall those people I have hurt today,  
by thoughtless action,  
and by thoughtful, malicious, hot-tempered action.

I recall those people who have hurt me,  
unintentionally at times.  
and quite intentionally at other times.  
And I ask you to permit me to share with them all  
your gifts of forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewal.

I recall those people I have helped today,  
in small everyday actions of kindness,  
and in deeds of strong commitment.  
I recall those people who have helped me  
in all the myriad happenings, both large and small,  
that have borne me through this day.  
And I ask you to permit me to share with them all  
your gift of thanksgiving and praise.

I call to memory also those people I have ignored today,  
those whose essential contributions to my life  
I have blindly accepted and taken for granted,  
those who have shared the day with me  
and whom I have not even noticed,  
those who are so far away from me  
that I have no conception of their existence,  
their births, their joys, their griefs,  
their celebrations and their deaths.  
And I ask you to permit me to share with them all,  
if nothing else, at least the sense of your presence,  
and the power of your eternally overwhelming love.

Through Jesus Christ who was and is  
your presence, and your love with us.

DAY SEVEN

*Success*

Lord, I will need  
your support this day,  
not only when I fail,  
but also when I succeed.  
For my successes  
seem to set me even farther from you,  
and from my fellow human beings.

When I fail,  
I learn a lesson  
in humility, if nothing else.  
Failure makes me realize, even more,  
my complete dependence upon you,  
and upon other people.  
But whenever I manage  
to accomplish some great achievement,  
I am on my own and proud of it,  
dependent upon no one,  
supreme master of my fate.

Lord, keep me  
truly humble in whatever measure  
of success this day may bring.  
And grant, in all things,  
whether failure or success,  
that I might find you,  
and finding you,  
find all that I can ever ask,  
or hope for.

So may  
I live this day  
in the fullness of eternity,  
in the joy of your presence.

DAY SEVEN

*Seeking and finding*

I feel your presence now, Lord,  
 in the stillness of the evening,  
 and I am at peace—  
 like a tranquil pool, or a frost-bright winter sky,  
 a sunset city skyline, a bird rippling in song.

There is so much of peace around us, Father,  
 so much that is calm and patient,  
 so much of quiet, gentle loveliness.  
 A leaf caught in a breeze  
 flutters, yet is not frantic  
 as I have been this day.  
 A flock of pigeons scatters  
 from the sidewalk into sudden flight,  
 but soon settles back again, as if nothing had happened.  
 A woodland stream runs fast  
 across its rock-strewn bed,  
 but with none of the panic I have known.  
 There is violence and fear in nature,  
 but it seems brief, and swift in passing.  
 It does not disturb the overall symmetry,  
 the rightness of things, the fullness of peace.

Yet for me, Father,  
 and for so many of your human creatures,  
 the peace is what passes swiftly;  
 the panic, fear, and violence are what last.  
 And so our days are filled with the frenzied search  
 for what lies all around us, at our fingertips,  
 even behind our closing eyelids,  
 the tranquility of perfect trust in you.  
 Forgive my blindness to the subtle harmonies  
 of your world.  
 Let them feed me now,  
 and may I rest in peace this night.

DAY EIGHT



*With me, Lord*

Before I awaken this morning  
 you are with me, Lord,  
 and even as I open my eyes  
 you greet me with the gift of this new day.  
 May I take this certainty of your presence  
 with me into all this day can hold.

Be with me now as I go forth—  
 not as some weird  
 and ghostly watcher-over-me,  
 but as a deeper and truer awareness within:

an awareness  
 which is constantly  
 opening my mind to ideas,  
 to possibilities,  
 to relationships,  
 to understandings;

an awareness  
 which is constantly  
 opening my heart to trust,  
 to hope,  
 to sharing and giving,  
 to the call of the needs  
 of my fellow creatures;

an awareness  
 which is constantly  
 opening all of my senses  
 to the hidden joys,  
 the tiny discoveries,  
 the lesser celebrations  
 and the over-arching wonder  
 of your gift of life.

DAY EIGHT

*Your mysteries*

O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
 although I have been taught  
 to speak and think of you as one God,  
 three in one, and one in three,  
 in fact you are a mystery  
 beyond all my thought and reason and understanding.  
 And for this I praise and glorify your name.  
 For I have learned that mystery is a quality  
 that pervades so much that is basic  
 to the richness of my living.

Who can explain  
 the chemistry of music and poetry,  
 laughter and liking,  
 that strange and secret power  
 that draws persons together,  
 and unites them in a glance,  
 a smile, even a lifetime?  
 My days are spent surrounded by the unknown,  
 and even our science can only describe,  
 but seldom, if ever, really explain  
 the heights and depths of our existence.

I thank you, Lord,  
 that even though you are beyond my grasp,  
 you are still within my reach,  
 that even though I cannot hold  
 and fully comprehend you,  
 you can and do touch me  
 and call me out into the greatest mystery of all,  
 the mystery of life in you.

So make this day, for me, a further exploration  
 into the inexhaustible mystery  
 of your presence and your promise.

DAY NINE

*Listening*

As I begin to pray this morning,  
 I am aware that I have far too much to say,  
 and far too little to listen for.  
 Catch hold of me in prayer, Lord.  
 So much of what I say  
 is simply a going-through-the-motions,  
 a speedy repetition of sacred phrases,  
 calculated to produce a warm,  
 if somewhat vacant, glow deep inside.

Break into my prattle, Lord.  
 Drive out the money changers  
 from the temple of your presence,  
 those bargain-basement prayers:  
 Father, make me pure—but not yet.  
 God, grant me success—then I will believe.  
 Lord, let me fall in love—and I'm all yours.

Interrupt my fevered chatter, Father.  
 Replace my empty noises with the fullness of your silence.  
 And in that silence let me hear  
 your simple word of truth that calls me into life.  
 The truth that I am yours, and not my own.  
 The truth that your faithfulness will never abandon me,  
 that even in the most painful and desperate moments  
 all of your love, all of your power  
 is on my side, forever.  
 The truth that there is work for me to do,  
 to share that love and power, to make it a reality,  
 not only in my life, but in the lives of those around me,  
 and especially those in need.

Let me hear, and know, and live your truth, Lord.  
 Then send me forth to do your holy will  
 in Jesus' name.

DAY NINE

*Review*

From all the random busyness  
 and scattered encounters  
 of this day that is ending—  
 from conversations and obligations,  
 impulses yielded to  
 and impulses suppressed,  
 acts of love, acts of hate, acts of emptiness,  
 from breakings and mendings,  
 laughings and cryings—  
 from all the richness and the barrenness  
 of these hours which are now past, Father,  
 I draw myself together into prayer.

As the moments of this day  
 pass before me in review, I become aware  
 of something sensed, at times,  
 yet never fully recognized:  
 your presence in all of my living,  
 speaking to me subtly  
 through the soft light of morning,  
 the occasional tones of music and song,  
 refreshing me in sunshine, and in coffee,  
 in smiles and handclasps,  
 calling to me through appointments,  
 news broadcasts, and meetings,  
 judging me in silences, moments of failure,  
 outbursts of anger,  
 forgiving me, accepting me,  
 supporting me,  
 rejoicing me in grace upon grace,  
 resting me in the purple shades of evening,  
 and restoring me now,  
 in this simple act of worship.

Thank you, Father.

DAY TEN



*Manna*

While they wandered  
 in the wilderness, Lord,  
 you fed your people, the children of Israel,  
 with the gift of manna from the skies,  
 bread falling from heaven—new every morning—  
 sufficient for the day,  
 and only for that day,  
 to be eaten in joy and thanksgiving  
 and never stored up for tomorrow.  
 And for those who doubted  
 and sought to hoard  
 your bread of life,  
 their store turned foul by morning.

Early in this morning, Father,  
 I rise to gather the fresh manna  
 of your love.  
 Fill me now to overflowing  
 with the strength, the grace, and the truth  
 I will need for the tasks ahead.  
 Then go with me  
 to ensure that  
 I give these gifts away,  
 that I spend them all  
 as currency for this day,  
 keeping nothing for myself,  
 guarding no store for the morrow,  
 sharing your gifts  
 in all that I do,  
 all that I am—  
 lest like manna of old,  
 stored love turns stale,  
 and poisons its possessor.

DAY TEN

*Stretching*

When I come to you in prayer, Father,  
 at the end of the day,  
 I come before you in confession,  
 not because this is the correct thing to do,  
 not because I know that I ought to feel guilty,  
 but because, as I look at myself and my life,  
 in the quiet and calm of this hour,  
 I begin to see myself as you must see me.  
 I begin to see how petty and trivial  
 my life has become, how small,  
 how crushingly small,  
 has been the content of my days.

You have granted me life, abundant life,  
 and I have chosen merely to exist.  
 You have given me people to love and be loved by,  
 and I have chosen to love myself, alone.  
 You have set me within a boundless creation,  
 and I have chosen to be bound by the limits  
 of my own narrow self-interest.

I have sold my birthright  
 for a mess of pottage, traded in  
 my priceless freedom for a solid investment  
 in security, and a reasonable, if modest prospect  
 of what is known as success.

Forgive me my smallness, Lord,  
 And in your forgiveness renew me.  
 Bestow, yet again, your eternal gift of new life,  
 so that grasping my newfound freedom, and living in it,  
 I can so broaden my narrow boundaries that they stretch  
 to include all of life, and all of humanity.  
 In this gift of life I rest the night.

DAY ELEVEN

*In the world*

Lord, I am preparing to enter a world  
which can get along very well without you—  
or so it believes.

In the situations, the assignments, the relationships  
I will face during the next few hours,  
the unspoken assumption will prevail  
that you do not exist; or if you do exist,  
that you are not concerned about such mundane matters  
as make up my day.

Questions of morality, problems of justice,  
the determining of your will,  
the welfare of all humankind—  
these are matters we would prefer to leave out  
of our everyday affairs.  
They make for interesting conversation,  
but when they begin to complicate  
that already overcomplex process of earning daily bread,  
then we simply cut them out of our consideration.  
“Life is hard enough as it is,”  
we say—or words to that effect—  
and we get on with business-as-usual.

Teach me, Father, how to be truly “in the world”  
and yet not “of the world.”  
Show me once again, as you did in Jesus,  
how I can love this world, celebrate its beauty,  
even give myself to it in service,  
without adopting all its ways,  
its values, its assumptions, its priorities.

In all I do this day  
let my vision be set  
not by the boundaries of this world,  
but by the horizons of your kingdom.

DAY ELEVEN

*Those around me*

There are so many who need my prayers, Father,  
 so many that, at times, I despair of praying.  
 Yet, I pray again tonight in the faith  
 that sets me actively to the answering of my own prayers  
 in your name.  
 In this faith, then, I dare to pray.

Tonight I remember especially  
 all those with whom I share my everyday life.  
 I pray for my family, at home, and far from home.  
 I pray for those who work with me,  
 those who direct my work,  
 and those who assist it, or complete it.  
 I call to mind and heart my friends,  
 and also those with whom I contend,  
 those who threaten me, and those whom I threaten.

Grant, Lord, to all of them,  
 and to me, the experience of your grace.  
 Persuade us, once again,  
 that whatever we do, or do not do, we are not judged,  
 we are not valued, nor are we loved,  
 solely on the basis of our achievements.  
 We are not justified by success, nor damned by failure.  
 But we are affirmed simply and completely as persons,  
 persons of infinite value,  
 persons bearing the potential and the privilege  
 of sharing with you in the greatest of all acts,  
 the acts of creative love,  
 of life in freedom and responsibility.

Lord, help me take this wisdom into my being,  
 into my attitudes, into all my living,  
 that I might rejoice in the fullness  
 of the brotherhood and sisterhood of all creation.

DAY TWELVE



*First and last*

Lord, let me live this day  
 as if it were my first day,  
 or my last.

Let me bring to it  
 all the wonder and amazement of a newborn child:  
 the trust  
 that welcomes everyone I meet,  
 expects of them only the best,  
 and grants them the benefit  
 of every possible doubt;  
 the openness  
 to catch the unsuspected beauties,  
 and unexpected opportunities of each hour;  
 the purity of soul  
 that places all its hope in you  
 and, thus, is infinitely optimistic.

But let me also bring  
 the wisdom and experience of the aged to this day:  
 the mellow ripeness  
 that can afford to rest a while,  
 and share a smile and a story;  
 the tenderness  
 that grows from years of care and gentle giving;  
 the hope  
 that has been forged through all the fires of doubt,  
 and even of despair,  
 and still, even better than before,  
 rings true and clear,  
 and points itself to you.

Lord, help me make this day  
 as fresh and new as a spring flower,  
 and as strong and secure as the eternal hills.

DAY TWELVE

*Idle chatter*

It is so easy, Father, to discuss the words of life,  
to talk the talk of faith.

We stress the importance of dialogue,  
yet we ignore the content of your dialogue:  
“Whoever would be great among you,  
let him be the servant of all.”

We are enthusiastic over the need for communication,  
yet we forget that the only way you could communicate  
was by giving yourself completely.

We are eager to relate to one another,  
yet we have not learned the basic lesson  
of giving before we receive,  
of losing life in order to find it.

We talk so freely of “love.”

Yet we seldom, if ever, allow ourselves to realize  
that love is no wishy-washy, doormat existence  
that love can be a stern taskmaster,  
that love can mean saying *No*,  
can even mean alienating people,  
causing pain, as well as feeling it,  
that love is still the surest, fastest way to the cross.

Forgive me, Lord, this trivialization of ultimate truths.  
Deliver me from my smooth sincerity,  
my authorized authenticity,  
my institutionalized integrity.  
Set my feet on the long road  
of working out what it means to truly love,  
and serve, and be sincere.

May I have that mind in myself  
which was in Christ Jesus,  
who humbled himself, and became obedient unto death.  
For in this is my integrity,  
my dialogue, and my communication.

DAY THIRTEEN

*Easing pressure*

In the heat of this day, Lord,  
 may I know your cooling presence,  
 calming my tension, soothing my fears,  
 bringing into all the pettiness,  
 all the overwhelming detail,  
 all the mind-boggling complexity,  
 the perspective of your simple word of grace:  
 “Consider the lilies.”

In the din and clash of the next few hours, Father,  
 let me hear your voice,  
 centering all relationships, all encounters,  
 all dispute and controversies,  
 in the challenge:  
 “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

In the push and shove of my work, Lord,  
 let me feel your hand,  
 examining all my decisions,  
 all my dealings, all my hopes and fears,  
 in the eternal light of:  
 “Seek first the kingdom of God.”

In the traffic jam of my brain, Father,  
 may I know your wisdom,  
 reordering all urgencies,  
 all priorities,  
 all dreams and ambitions,  
 under one supreme claim:  
 “I am the Lord, your God.”

Thus may I walk  
 by the power of your word,  
 and not my own.

DAY THIRTEEN

*Myself, yourself*

This evening, Father, as on so many evenings,  
 I am concerned about myself.  
 I realize that self-concern can be dangerous.  
 But it persists. I am concerned about myself.

The heart of the problem is  
 my self just doesn't measure up.  
 I am not smart enough. I am not popular enough.  
 I work too hard, then I do not work at all.  
 Everyone seems to be better than I am at something.  
 And so, I guess, I am good for nothing.

Naturally I manage to fool some of the people—  
 some of the time,  
 maybe even most of the people—most of the time.  
 But deep inside there lurks the cold suspicion  
 that all I am, and all I do, is marked by failure.  
 And too often that suspicion becomes a certainty.  
 Lord, I have failed—I have failed.

Teach me again tonight, Father,  
 the lesson that Jesus taught, that Jesus lived,  
 the lesson of atonement.  
 Convince me once again that you have seen  
 all my failures,  
 and have covered them over,  
 blotted them out from your sight forever.

Help me to accept myself, as you have accepted me,  
 recognizing failure, fully admitting its reality,  
 yet beyond all failure, affirming my own ultimate value  
 as your child, created in your own holy image.  
 Grant me, Lord, the grace of self-acceptance.  
 And in that grace lead me to accept others also  
 as fellow heirs of your abundant, creative,  
 and redeeming love.

DAY FOURTEEN



*Fool*

Lord, there is in my nature  
 that which cannot bear  
 to be made a fool,  
 to feel like a fool.

Somehow I would rather  
 feel a cheat, a crook, a liar even,  
 than to feel a fool.  
 At least, then, I would have my wits about me.  
 But a fool is witless.  
 And at times I value my intelligence  
 even more than my integrity.

Show me, today,  
 the wisdom of your foolishness, Father.  
 Overthrow the wisdom of this world  
 from its dominion over my life.  
 And let my living  
 be determined by Jesus,  
 the crucified one.

Let this foolishness,  
 the foolishness of the cross,  
 the foolishness of radical openness,  
 the foolishness of self-sacrificial giving,  
 of losing life, and thus finding it—  
 let your foolishness be my wisdom this day, Father.

And thus, may I affirm with Saint Paul:  
 The foolishness of God  
 is wiser than men.

In the name of Jesus Christ I ask this,  
 who became a fool for my sake.

DAY FOURTEEN

*Aging*

Another evening, Lord, another day:  
 a day older,  
 but not necessarily richer, or wiser;  
 a day closer to the weekend, the vacation,  
 to a time when I can relax and rest a while;  
 a day closer to that day, whenever it be,  
 that will be, for me,  
 the last day, the day I die, the end.

Father, I am afraid even to think about that day,  
 its pain, its parting, its awful finality.  
 I love my days,  
 and so I live my days—most of them—  
 as if that day will never come,  
 as if, for me, there will be no end,  
 no closing of the book, no cutting of the cord.

Teach me, Lord, as I now prepare myself for sleep,  
 so to prepare myself for death.  
 Create in me a simple trust that morning will come,  
 that there will be awakening,  
 and greetings, and a great reunion,  
 breaking fast around your table.  
 Teach me again the poet's lesson  
 that parting is such sweet sorrow,  
 preparing, as it does, for an even sweeter reunion.

And grant me,  
 as a follower of the one who conquered death,  
 the steady and growing assurance  
 that in death, as in the finest moments of life,  
 I will be with you—  
 which is all I can know,  
 and all I can wish for.

DAY FIFTEEN

*Escape*

It is an amazing gift, Lord,  
 to begin the day in prayer,  
 to open the doors of the morning in your presence,  
 and in the knowledge of your blessing.

Yet, even as I pray,  
 I realize that prayer,  
 like all your gifts, can be abused.  
 Preserve me then, Father,  
 from that false use of prayer  
 which seeks to use you as an escape  
 from the trials and troubles of this world.

Let this, my time of worship,  
 be an hour in which the suffering of humankind  
 becomes more, and not less, real for me.

Grant me to share at least a little of your perspective  
 on the agony of your children,  
 my brothers and sisters.  
 Reveal to me the failure,  
 the inadequacy, of my vision,  
 which does not yet compel me  
 to see myself, and yourself,  
 in each and every victim of despair.  
 Permit me a glimpse  
 into the anguish of your heart,  
 that anguish which only Jesus fully knew  
 and shared upon the cross.

And, in the power of that cross,  
 deepen my compassion,  
 renew my dedication  
 to the way of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
 who came, not to be ministered unto,  
 but to minister,  
 and to be servant of all.

DAY FIFTEEN

*Demand and invitation*

My day has been swamped in demands, Lord,  
 laying their claims upon me, sinking their claws deep:  
 demands for food and shelter, for security and sympathy,  
 for artistic expression and sexual gratification,  
 for status and significance and hope.  
 Demands can be other people too, Lord:  
 demands of family and of friends,  
 demands of neighbors, fellow citizens,  
 fellow victims, fellow human beings.  
 Demands, demands, demands . . .

Yet among, and even within, the demands of today  
 there have also been the invitations,  
 of necessity quiet and low-key, but there, nonetheless:  
 a morning of crisp sunlight,  
 a book of poems, a piece of clay,  
 the smell of fresh coffee,  
 the sound of singing close at hand, laughter, tears,  
 arms outstretched, the eyes of a child.

The demands are real. I know that, Father,  
 and I cannot turn them off, though they din  
 till my head and my life spin in circles.  
 But I need your help to see, Lord,  
 that the invitations are real too—just as real,  
 just as essential as the demands.  
 And either one, without the other, destroys,  
 making of life a tormented, guilty hell on earth,  
 or an empty heaven, void of caring, of commitment,  
 of self-giving.

Continue, Lord, to set my days  
 within your divine context of demand and invitation.  
 And open my eyes to discover in this  
 life which is bountiful and abundant.

DAY SIXTEEN



*Providence*

Go into this day before me, Father,  
just as your grace has always preceded me:  
claiming me in baptism,  
keeping me in childhood,  
guiding me in adolescence,  
preserving me until this moment,  
preparing me  
for the glorious daily privilege  
of life in service  
and in communion with you.

In times of stress and worry,  
when the future seems a dark cloud,  
and the lightning starts to flicker on the horizon,  
when I begin to be afraid about my health,  
my financial security,  
the well-being of my family,  
and those I love,  
remind me again, Lord,  
of how you have prepared a way  
for me, and mine.

Help me to know  
that wherever I am  
you have been there before me,  
opening the way.  
And grant me the assurance  
that somewhere up ahead  
you wait for me,  
with wonderful surprises in store.

This I ask in Jesus' name,  
in whom is my future  
with you.

DAY SIXTEEN

*Testing*

O God of truth,  
of justice,  
and of deep-searching, demanding love,  
I thank you this morning that you put me to the test,  
that you have, and still do, set before me  
opportunities to stand  
for what is right and good, pure and lovely,  
that you beset me, behind and before,  
with challenges and the call to high adventure  
where the stakes are life and death.

Forgive me that most of the time  
I am quite content to share  
the immense wealth and power of this land  
while your people still perish.  
Forgive me that most of the time  
I fail even to recognize the golden idols.  
So well disguised are they—  
success, comfort, security,  
prestige, and gracious living—  
that I worship them  
without realizing that I am spending my life  
flat on my face.

Make me aware again, Lord, of my idolatry,  
those deep, often subconscious longings  
that lord it over my life.  
And then stand with me in the fiery furnace,  
that when I am tested my dross might flare away  
and your image in me remain pure and clear.

And grant me, Lord, no more than the privilege  
of following in your footsteps,  
through him who led the way for all,  
Jesus, your Son, my Savior.

DAY SEVENTEEN

*Incarnation*

Two thousand years ago, in Palestine,  
 your Word took on our flesh,  
 was born a human child,  
 and lived, and died for us,  
 in Jesus.

But that was not the end.  
 Jesus arose from death  
 to live eternal victory  
 at your right hand—  
 and also, we believe,  
 to walk this earth again  
 in those who bear his name,  
 and try to live his life.

As I begin this day,  
 become flesh again  
 in me, Father.  
 Let your timeless and everlasting love  
 live out this sunrise to sunset  
 within the possibilities,  
 and the impossibilities,  
 of my own, very human life.

Help me to become  
 Christ to my neighbor,  
 food to the hungry,  
 health to the sick,  
 friend to the lonely,  
 freedom to the enslaved,  
 in all my daily living.

Thus may I know the life of love,  
 the presence of joy,  
 the hope of glory.

DAY SEVENTEEN

*Opening*

Lord, teach me to be open, and receptive in my praying.  
 So often, when I pray,  
 the only thing that is open is my mouth.  
 My eyes are shut tight,  
 and with them my mind and my heart.  
 Lord, teach me to be open to the leading of your Spirit  
 as I pray.

In these times of concern for dialogue between persons,  
 I have allowed my praying to degenerate  
 into a tedious monologue  
 in which I do all the talking  
 and you do all the listening.  
 Yet it is written:  
 “Be still, and know that I am God.”  
 And again:  
 “In quietness and in trust shall be your strength.”

So teach me, Father,  
 that prayer is both a matter of speaking,  
 and of silence.  
 Draw especially close now  
 as I set a few minutes aside  
 to wait in silence,  
 and listen expectantly for your Word:  
 your judgment on my sin,  
 your forgiveness in Jesus my Lord,  
 your response to my requests,  
 your call to my readiness.

Let me learn again, Lord,  
 the prayer of your servant Samuel:  
 “Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.”  
 And let me make this prayer my own  
 tonight, and always.

DAY EIGHTEEN



*Your family*

People will be born today, Lord, and people will die.  
 People will marry, will leave home, will return again.  
 People will feast, will go hungry,  
 will make money, steal money, give money away.  
 People will succeed today, beyond their wildest dreams.  
 People will fail themselves into abysmal despair.  
 People will kill today, and people will love.

This human family, Father, is vast,  
 beyond all my comprehension,  
 beyond even my compassion.  
 I know it is here,  
 at times, I even admit to being a part of it,  
 but its complexity, its contrasts, as well as its sheer size,  
 overwhelm me.  
 Yet we are all your family, Lord.  
 Bring us closer together.  
 Help us to care for one another,  
 not only in an occasional prayer, like this one,  
 but in the way we spend our time and our money,  
 cast our votes, and raise our children.

In the way that I live this day,  
 may I demonstrate, at least respect,  
 if not outright love, for all human beings.  
 Renew in me, Lord, the realization  
 that the loss of any individual diminishes me,  
 for we all have something to share,  
 something to teach, something to give.  
 Thus let me make the human family  
 less an ideal, more a reality,  
 in my own life,  
 and in the life of my own small family.  
 In the name of Jesus, who first taught us  
 to call you, "Father."

DAY EIGHTEEN

*Security*

So much of my living, Father,  
 is bound up in the search for security.  
 Desperately I seek after life without risks,  
 ironclad assurances, complete coverage,  
 guaranteed guarantees.

No sooner have we humans stepped into this world,  
 than we commence preparations  
 to cushion our departure:  
 retirement plans, pension schemes,  
 annuities, benefits, double indemnities,  
 precautions for a future which may never arrive.

Teach me, instead, to live with insecurity, Lord,  
 to realize that life is essentially insecure,  
 and to accept, and affirm it as such,  
 in all of its glorious insecurity.  
 Show me, again, that the grave  
 is totally secure—  
 no risks, no chances, no hopes.  
 Weave into the fabric of my daily life  
 the message of the parables of Jesus,  
 that we can secure nothing against death,  
 nothing except abundant life  
 in this present, eternal moment.  
 And in this message let me find all the security there is,  
 all the security I could ever hope for:  
 the secure assurance that, in this  
 and in every fully lived moment,  
 I stand in your presence,  
 I rest within your care,  
 I participate in love,  
 the only thing which is truly,  
 and eternally, secure.

DAY NINETEEN

*Dreaming*

Dreams, Father. What are they?  
 Where do they come from? Where do they go?  
 I awaken in a sweat of terror, or a glow of delight.  
 The alarm clock reprieves me at the last minute,  
 or deprives me of the final moment of fruition.  
 And I lie and wonder about dreams.

Sometimes it seems a whole lifetime is spent  
 in the passing of one brief hour of sleep.  
 At other times,  
 one moment of anguish, bewilderment, or bliss,  
 is all that is known before rising.  
 Sometimes I seem to be places I know,  
 with people I love.  
 At other times I do not even know  
 where or who I am.

One-third of my life is spent in dreams, Father,  
 and when I do not dream, I am not fully rested.  
 Are dreams, perhaps, my wishes  
 and my fears come to life in an inner world?  
 Or are they simply the result of something I ate,  
 a piece of cheese, or too many cups of tea?

Strangest, maybe, of all your gifts of life,  
 might it be that dreaming  
 prepares us for your closer presence,  
 reminds us that all that we are,  
 waking or sleeping,  
 is bounded by a vast and holy mystery,  
 the mystery and the majesty of your being?

For that mystery, I thank you,  
 and am content in knowing  
 that even in the depths of slumber  
 I rest within your everlasting arms.

DAY NINETEEN

*Strength in weakness*

Lord, there are weaknesses,  
 and then, there are weaknesses.  
 For, although I realize how weak I am,  
 I have a hard time discovering your strength  
 in my weakness.

I know very well what weakness is all about.  
 Time after time I have assented to your simple words:  
 “Save your life—and you will lose it.  
 Lose your life, for my sake—and you will find it.”  
 Yet, time after time,  
 I have proceeded to behave exactly as I have always done:  
 saving my own life, protecting my own interests,  
 using people, rather than serving them,  
 living a life of manipulation,  
 of making deals, of easy compromises.  
 I talk about “love,” read about, sing about “love,”  
 but love itself is conspicuous  
 only by its absence from my existence.  
 Yes, Lord, I know what weakness is all about.

Forgive me, Father,  
 for persisting in my own weakness.  
 Help me to find myself in your weakness:  
 that radical weakness before all the world holds strong,  
 that weakness in terms of success, strategy,  
 power, and prestige, which you can transform  
 into a deep and abiding strength,  
 that weakness we see in Jesus,  
 who in his living, and dying, and rising again,  
 showed us the true meaning of strength,  
 of the powerful acceptance of suffering,  
 of glorious victory through defeat,  
 of triumphant life through death.

DAY TWENTY



*My mind*

I thank you, Lord,  
 for all the wisdom of the past,  
 for the devoted labors of teachers and scholars  
 who have prized truth above all else,  
 for the discipline of clear, sharp thinking,  
 and the dissipation of confusion and prejudice.

Grant me grace, this day,  
 to continue in that passion for the truth.  
 Teach me to care  
 more for honesty  
 than for systems,  
 or for skill in debate.  
 And give me the patience  
 to keep open those questions  
 which cannot yet,  
 and perhaps never will, be answered.

Father, make me free  
 and alert in my reading and my thinking.  
 In the clear light of your truth  
 let me discern what value to set  
 on each one of this day's events,  
 and how best to deploy my resources  
 for today's decisions.

When I have to choose,  
 as so often I must,  
 between two evils,  
 give me, at least, the will to do the right,  
 and the assurance  
 that, even when I am at my wit's end,  
 I am never out of reach  
 of your mercy.

DAY TWENTY

*For our riches*

I pray today,  
 not only for the suffering,  
 the hungry, the war-torn, the lost,  
 for they are always in my prayers.  
 But I pray for the wealthy,  
 the prosperous, the comfortable of this world.

Open the sleepy eyes  
 of the wealthy nations, Lord.  
 Awaken us from our overfed slumber  
 to responsibility for our needy brothers and sisters.  
 Teach us, again,  
 how much we have that we do not need,  
 and how much they need that they do not have.  
 Persuade us,  
 set the conviction deep within us,  
 that our comfort is at their expense,  
 our well-being at the cost of their misery.

Set us free, Father,  
 from our clinging to the overstuffed life.  
 Set us free, Father,  
 for the bringing of life,  
 basic life, to all humankind.  
 Show us our task  
 in these days when the world  
 and its resources grow ever more limited:  
 never simply the preserving of a national way of life,  
 rather the provision for the first fully human way of life.

May my life, Lord,  
 begin to witness to these truths  
 and to follow the path of the one  
 who gave his life to save our lives  
 and to bring life, new life, to all.

DAY TWENTY-ONE

*Abraham*

O God,  
 you are calling me out  
 into a completely new day,  
 a day in which I will encounter  
 the unexpected, the strange, the unknown.

May I go forth, as Abraham did, long ago,  
 abandoning the clinging comforts of conformity,  
 rejecting the sham support and security  
 of all that is false and dishonest,  
 and trusting only in you,  
 your promises,  
 your presence to guide,  
 your power to preserve me from all evil.

When I am tested—  
 as I know I will be tested—  
 let me respond out of love,  
 the depth of your love in me.  
 May I be ready to give myself  
 even to the utmost,  
 for you, and your gospel,  
 and for those for whom you died.

And when I reach the end of this day,  
 draw me to yourself again,  
 and let my day have been to some  
 a source of blessing,  
 and to me a source of deeper faith.

In the name of him who was,  
 even before Abraham was,  
 Jesus Christ my call,  
 my guide,  
 my goal.

DAY TWENTY-ONE

*Your day*

This day, Lord, has been your day,  
but I have sought to make it my own.

I have pulled it out of shape,  
fractured its delicate framework,  
and hopelessly entangled its contents,  
in a vain attempt to use this day  
rather than to live it.

Instead of allowing this day  
to fill my life with living,  
I have contrived to fill the day  
with my own needs,  
concerns, demands.  
And so I have wasted the day,  
torn it apart,  
soiled its original freshness,  
and now it lies shattered  
all around me.

Pardon me, Father,  
my willful disobedience,  
my petty selfishness.  
And in these quiet moments  
let me salvage at least  
the closing of this day for you.

Make this evening hour,  
once again, your hour,  
that, in yielding myself  
to its contours and rhythms,  
I might lose myself  
and find myself  
in the vastness  
of your grace.

DAY TWENTY-TWO



*Weather report*

Each morning, as I awake, Lord,  
I raise the blind to check the weather.

It makes such a difference to me,  
this rain-or-shine world.  
Perhaps it really shouldn't, but it does.  
A sunny, crisp morning in January,  
a cool, clear sunrise in May,  
and I begin the day ahead of myself,  
ready for anything—or almost anything.  
But a frigid, drifting Monday,  
or a damp and dreary Wednesday morning,  
can end a day before it has even begun.  
Of course, I realize, “We need the rain,”  
and “Into each life a little rain must fall,”  
but whenever it falls into mine,  
it depresses me just the same.

Lord, teach me to praise you  
for all states and conditions of life.  
For, just as the rain brings nourishment and growth,  
new strength to the earth, preparing it to blossom  
with the return of the sun,  
so times of trial and pain,  
difficulty and hardship in my life, seem to be times  
in which I sink my roots deeper and grow taller.

Help me this morning, whatever kind of morning it is,  
to receive it as my morning, your-gift-to-me morning,  
as yet another opportunity, rain or shine,  
to spend some time with me, and with you.  
Let your sun rise splendid in my heart now,  
and send me forth to bear your radiance  
to all I meet this day.

DAY TWENTY-TWO

*Word power*

From a world crammed full-to-overflowing with words,  
 I seek the peace and calm,  
 the evening quiet, of your presence, Lord.

For hour upon hour  
 words have tugged and taunted me,  
 delighting me, arousing me, seducing me, wearying me,  
 deluging me from printed page and lighted screen,  
 from radio, typewriter, and telephone.  
 Across the breakfast table they pour,  
 across the bench, across the classroom, across the counter,  
 swamping, submerging, drowning my brain.

What a wonderful thing it is, at last,  
 to be still and taste the silence.

In this time of peace, Father,  
 let me hold my peace, and listen for your Word.  
 Send forth the Word  
 to cut through the clamor and din of today's Babel,  
 to speak to me, gently but surely,  
 of judgment, forgiveness, and hope.  
 Let the Word that became flesh in Jesus  
 speak to me now of deep-running joy  
 in you.

Above all, Father,  
 lead me ever further into that union with you  
 in which all the words begin  
 to take on new meaning,  
 meaning rooted and grounded  
 in your one, supreme word,  
 the word, "Love."  
 Thus may my words draw closer to yours.  
 Thus may the Word  
 sing through all of my living.

DAY TWENTY-THREE

*Conflict*

Father, these days are filled with disagreement,  
 and the potential for dispute seems to be ever present.  
 This very day, at times,  
 my views may not coincide with my neighbor's,  
 my desires may be too close to my neighbor's,  
 my fatigue, my impatience,  
 may blind me to the presence of my neighbor.  
 Assist me, Lord, to deal with conflict situations.

May I never be afraid to differ,  
 honestly and respectfully, with a fellow human being.  
 But may I also never seek to differ,  
 purposely look for points of difference,  
 and provoke conflict where conflict need not exist.  
 Let me not attempt to preserve peace at all costs,  
 even at the cost of truth.  
 But let me not be so jealous for truth,  
 a truth about which none of us can be all that certain,  
 that I am constantly quarreling and squabbling,  
 making mountains out of molehills  
 rather than moving mountains through love.  
 Teach me the difference, Father,  
 between honest and open disagreement,  
 even over crucial issues,  
 and that bitter and divisive conflict  
 which sets persons against one another,  
 destroys all respect for the humanity of the opponent.

Let me become, more fully,  
 a citizen of the new creation, inaugurated by Jesus,  
 the new, liberated humanity,  
 in which all the dividing walls are gone forever,  
 in which all hostilities have ceased,  
 and your peace has begun its reign.  
 Let your peace reign in my life this day, Lord.

DAY TWENTY-THREE

*Night people*

As I turn now to the hours of rest, Father,  
let me pause for a moment, and remember those  
for whom rest is an unobtainable luxury.

I think of those who are ill,  
whose drugged sleep brings little or no refreshment,  
only the temporary absence of pain.  
I recall those who watch over the sick, Lord,  
who spend sleepless hours struggling to bring health  
or hoping and praying to alleviate suffering.  
Those who work at night  
are in my thoughts this evening:  
the parent holding down two jobs  
to provide for a growing family;  
the truck driver enduring long and lonely hours  
for a dream of happiness way up ahead;  
the airline pilot,  
human lives continually in her all-too-human hands;  
the nurse-by-night, housekeeper-by-day,  
struggling to support an already broken home;  
the bartender serving up sympathy  
to the same old sad stories;  
the police officer and firefighter,  
under fire, underpaid, under increasing pressure  
to betray the trust of an unappreciative society;  
the thief, the pusher, and the prostitute,  
seeking survival at any cost  
in the human jungle we call the city.

Let your spirit be abroad while I sleep, Father,  
bringing hope to the hopeless,  
comfort to those in pain, trust to those in turmoil,  
and the knowledge of your presence  
to all who need you this night.

DAY TWENTY-FOUR



*Blood*

The blood of life  
 goes pulsing through my veins this morning, Lord.  
 I become aware of its unceasing flow  
 in the daybreak silence of this moment,  
 and I give thanks for the wonder of my body.

This blood which rivers through us  
 is an amazing substance to me, Father.  
 It is so precious, so irreplaceable.  
 We cannot manufacture blood.  
 We understand so little about its nature.  
 And yet we shed it so easily, thoughtlessly, cruelly.  
 Blood flows and cries for vengeance from the soil  
 today and every day.  
 Blood binds us all together as your children.  
 No matter what the color of our skin,  
 the shape of our features, the land of our birth,  
 we bleed in common fellowship, rich and red.  
 And, given certain careful preparations,  
 one's blood can serve and save another,  
 regardless of race or class, age or sex.

In fact, Lord, the blood of one  
 did serve and save us all,  
 regardless of race or class, age or sex,  
 or even of moral and religious standing.  
 For Jesus  
 and his gift of life  
 transfusing a new being  
 into my old and aching veins  
 I give you thanks again, this morning, Lord.  
 And I pray that his life blood  
 may also pulse its way  
 throughout my living this day.

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

*Food*

I have feasted this day, Lord,  
 eaten more than I needed to eat,  
 eaten just for the sake of eating,  
 for the pleasure of the taste  
 and the texture of food in my mouth.  
 Lord, I have eaten my fill, and more than my fill.  
 My body rebels at this abuse.  
 I grow fat, and sluggish, without energy or stamina.  
 No longer a temple of the spirit,  
 my body becomes a decaying memorial,  
 testimony to the destructive powers of excess.

I have feasted this day, Lord,  
 and others have starved.

The very scraps left on my plate  
 could have sustained life for a week  
 somewhere, somehow.  
 Do not permit me to forget this, Lord.  
 Do not permit me to forget the hunger, the starvation,  
 of my brothers and sisters  
 in other lands, other continents.  
 Pursue me with the specter  
 of the starving infant of humanity  
 until I begin to turn my life around,  
 until I begin to care about starvation,  
 until I begin to use the life, the health,  
 the strength that is in my body  
 to serve your children,  
 to bring all humanity to a seat at the table of your grace,  
 at the table you have spread  
 for all of us,  
 or for none of us.

So may I share the banquet feast of love.

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

*Defense*

This day is no sooner begun  
 than I am feverishly at work  
 seeking ways to protect, to cushion,  
 to ease my way through it.  
 Lord, I am a defensive, risk-hating creature.  
 Everything must be nailed down for me,  
 guaranteed in advance.

I seek love.  
 I yearn to receive the love of others.  
 Yet I will not take the risk of loving first,  
 of taking the initiative.  
 I demand an assured return on love,  
 or I will not make the investment.

I want to be needed.  
 I need to feel needed, depended upon by others.  
 Yet I am afraid to admit my own needs—  
 my desperate need for you, Father,  
 my need for my fellow human beings.  
 I seek to escape my own needs  
 by feeling essential to others.

I hate being alone.  
 I crave human fellowship, the company of friends.  
 Yet I cringe, even more, from being known.  
 I create a false self, wear it like a mask,  
 preferring loneliness to the sharing of my true self.

Deliver me this morning, Father,  
 from the tomb of my defenses.  
 Set me free from the fortress of my fears.  
 And lead me out into the glorious fullness  
 of life which is lived in the open.  
 Grant me to live, this day, in the freedom of eternity.

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

*Strangers*

My day has been punctuated  
 by strangers, Lord.  
 Both at work  
 and in relaxation,  
 strangers have brushed  
 against the fringes of my life  
 and then moved on.  
 How have I greeted these strangers, Lord?  
 What stranger self have I presented to them?

I think about the strangers in your life:  
 the three who journeyed from afar,  
 the one who came by night,  
 the woman at the well,  
 and the one wounded beside the road.

You gave yourself to strangers.  
 And once, at least,  
 you came yourself as stranger  
 to the two on the Emmaus road,  
 revealing just as much  
 as they were able to comprehend,  
 until, at last,  
 the gift of hospitality exchanged,  
 you were known to them  
 in the breaking of the bread.

So teach me to be open  
 to your presence in the stranger, Lord,  
 to keep an open door,  
 an open time and place,  
 an open life.

And let me be no stranger  
 to your presence and your love.

DAY TWENTY-SIX



*The dance*

Teach me to dance, Lord.  
 I find it so difficult, somehow.  
 Clapping with a song, moving feet gracefully,  
 giving myself up to a tune, a rhythm, a beat—  
 all this is so hard, so creakingly stiff for me.  
 I prefer the plodding, measured tread of everyday.

We humans seem to march  
 so much more readily than we dance.  
 Whole nations pace in step to one idea, one leader,  
 one common fear, or hatred, or ambition.  
 Teach us to dance instead—  
 to link hands, and arms with each other,  
 and run, and skip, and leap,  
 and swoop, and fall, and rise again,  
 rejoicing in the freedom of being,  
 and of being together, with you and in you.

I recall those whose dance is slow this morning,  
 because of pain, or loss, or hunger,  
 or being left to dance alone.  
 I pray for all in chains,  
 whether self-imposed, or shackled from without.  
 You, yourself, Lord Jesus, have known  
 fetters and imprisonment.  
 So be with them, and let them know your presence,  
 sharing their lostness, hopelessness, and fear.

And now, Lord, send me forth,  
 dancing forth to break the chains,  
 to shatter all that keeps us from ourselves  
 and from each other.  
 Let me share with all your gospel  
 of liberation, of deliverance to all captives,  
 of life, full and free, and flowing with the dance.

DAY TWENTY-SIX

*Resting*

There is a kind of rest  
 which I am seeking this evening, Father:  
 not so much a passive resting—  
 simply doing nothing at all—  
 rather an active rest.

The kind of resting that I know  
 when I see a great building  
 resting on deep and firm foundations,  
 or a family, or church, or community  
 resting on a basic and shared trust,  
 despite the day-to-day problems and crises.

The kind of resting that I feel  
 when I am at peace, yet participating,  
 in silence, yet profoundly in communication,  
 with you and with the world around me.

The kind of resting that I have  
 in the conviction that, at the heart of all I know,  
 and of all I do not know,  
 you are there,  
 and you are love.

In this time of evening rest,  
 guide me to recognize,  
 and to reaffirm those things  
 which are true, and good, and beautiful.  
 And let me rebuild my life on these firm foundations.  
 Grant me the refreshment of that holy resting  
 which is never the denial of responsible action,  
 but rather the necessary preparation for that action.  
 Then grant me rest, Father,  
 and send me out tomorrow, renewed  
 for responsible action in love  
 and for peace.

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

*Simple things*

For the elemental simplicity of this morning hour,  
 sunrise, bird-song, cold clear water,  
 I praise and thank you, Lord.  
 Prayer, too, should be a simple gift,  
 yet I make it so difficult sometimes.

You have told me to come to you as a child to its father.  
 But I persist in approaching you  
 in a more official capacity:  
 as parent, householder and status-holder,  
 citizen, church member, officer in this-or-that,  
 as if these roles and titles  
 could protect me from your gaze,  
 from the searching power of your love.

Instead of admitting my sins,  
 and then honestly asking forgiveness,  
 I fret about my failures, analyzing them,  
 discussing them with myself,  
 permitting them to dominate my life in a double way—  
 first, as I commit them, and then,  
 in a perpetual orgy of regret, and unresolved guilt.  
 In my praying, as in so much of life,  
 I cannot see the forest for the trees.

Speak to me, now, your simple word  
 of forgiveness, of healing and restoration:  
 “Thus says the Lord: ‘I have loved you  
 with an everlasting love, therefore I  
 have continued my faithfulness to you.’”  
 Lord, help me to take this assurance  
 into the day that lies before me.  
 In all I do, may I act as one who is free,  
 free to find myself, free to be myself,  
 free to give myself, as Jesus gave, to the utmost.

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

*Prodigals*

This week, as every week,  
 I took out the garbage, Lord,  
 piled it high at the curb,  
 a silent memorial to the prodigality of seven days  
 in the life of one family.  
 So much wrapping, so much packaging,  
 so much to glitter, and glisten, and attract.  
 Even in this one day, now ended,  
 I have used and discarded so much,  
 and with so little thought—  
 so much waste, so many trees  
 and other precious living things  
 torn down and shredded into deadly refuse.

Forgive me, Father,  
 my careless squandering of your bounty.  
 Grant me a new reverence for your creation.  
 Show me how to use, only when necessary,  
 and only as much as is necessary,  
 to use responsibly,  
 aware of the needs of others,  
 and to use carefully,  
 replacing wherever possible  
 what has been taken away.

Above all, instill in me  
 a fundamental respect for all my fellow creatures,  
 my fellow passengers on our tiny spaceship, Earth.  
 Let me begin, in my own daily living,  
 to build your earthly kingdom of peace,  
 to fit my life more sensitively  
 into the cosmic harmony that you have ordained.  
 Thus may your kingdom come,  
 your will be done on Earth.

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT



*Rebirth*

I am being born again, Lord,  
 thrust out of the warm and comfortable womb  
 of my hard-won security,  
 thrust out into a brand-new day of challenges—  
 challenges to touch, to taste,  
 to smell and hear and see,  
 the world that is being born all around me,  
 challenges to grow with your world  
 as it unfolds within your purpose.

It can be a painful process,  
 this growing, Father.  
 The womb of yesterday was so much cozier,  
 so much easier to cope with,  
 so much more shaped to meet all my needs and desires.  
 Now I have to solve these problems for myself.  
 The old ways are no longer available to me.  
 The past is the past,  
 and you await me in the future.  
 New ways have to be found,  
 new ways for a new world,  
 new ways that require creativity,  
 and verve,  
 endurance, and trust in the future,  
 which is in your hands.

I am being born again, Lord.  
 Rebirth is a difficult, yet everyday, miracle—  
 the miracle of passing from yesterday into tomorrow,  
 the miracle of growth, of development, of life itself.  
 Help me, then, to accept  
 the changes of these days, to affirm them now,  
 and to step forward to the call of this new day  
 with joy.

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

*Judging*

A complex and dangerous faculty  
 is judgment, Lord.  
 I know it, I use it, and often, I abuse it.  
 I go through life,  
 I have gone through this day,  
 busily forming judgments, weighing persons  
 in my own peculiar balances  
 and, for the most part, finding them wanting.

Thus far, it has taken me a lifetime  
 to begin to understand myself.  
 Yet I am eager to size up a fellow human being  
 in the twinkling of an eye,  
 and then pronounce eternal fate  
 in terms of my future relationship  
 to him, or to her.

Father, forgive my snap and facile judgments.  
 Pardon me the easy way  
 in which I condemn my sisters and brothers.  
 Deliver me from this habit  
 that cuts me off from so much of the human family.  
 And let me reserve this faculty of judgment  
 for ideas, attitudes, and actions,  
 and for my own ideas, attitudes, and actions  
 before all others.

Grant that I might judiciously use my time, my talents,  
 my creativity, health, and strength,  
 not in judging others  
 but in seeking to understand them more fully.  
 In the name of Jesus I ask this,  
 who refused to judge us,  
 and died instead, to save us.

DAY TWENTY-NINE

*Children*

I hear the sound of children in the morning, Father,  
and I rejoice in the sweetness of your gifts.

For little children speak to me  
when I take the time to listen to them.  
Children seem to have a message all their own  
to bring to me,  
to bear to the heart of this, our age.  
Given half a chance, these children trust.  
And that is no mean feat in this world.

Openness is theirs,  
to gaiety and mystery,  
to fun as well as fear,  
to the movement of a caterpillar  
and the crashing terror of a thunderstorm.  
Self-control is not one of their strong points.  
Spontaneity and hope seem to come much easier.  
They want things, that is true.  
They can pester the life  
out of a day, or out of an adult.  
But their wants, when we heed them,  
are somewhat more easily met  
than the desires that drive adults to distraction.  
A candy bar, a trinket,  
a little attention and human fellowship  
is all they really want, nothing more.  
Small requests for such great rewards  
in honest smiles, true-to-life embraces,  
and the privilege of sharing simple gifts with friends.

Help me, for today,  
to stop teaching, and preaching,  
and to start learning from children, Father.

DAY TWENTY-NINE

*Thanks*

As I look back, Lord,  
 there is so much for which I am grateful  
 in the events of this day.

I thank you for the good times:  
 the closeness with friends,  
 joining in a laugh,  
 a meal, a task, a plan for the future;  
 the presence of my family,  
 living with me, daily,  
 the challenge and the blessing of true intimacy;  
 the things that worked out,  
 all the tasks I have been able to accomplish  
 and complete during the hours now past.

But I also look back  
 at some bad times, Father;  
 times when friends have turned out  
 to be just as human as I am,  
 and have let me down when I needed them;  
 times, too, when I have failed  
 by accepting less than the best,  
 less than the ultimate standard of your love  
 as the judge of all I say and do;  
 times when the intimacy of my family  
 has been less a blessing than a curse.

Forgive these bad times, Lord,  
 the little daily crucifixions that add weight  
 to the awful burden you bear.  
 And accept my gratitude for all of the good times.

And now I rest,  
 knowing that all of my times  
 are in your hand.

FOR SUNDAY



*Our day*

This day is your day, Lord,  
even more than all the others.

A day of rest for most,  
a day of play for many,  
a day for traveling and visiting,  
for gardening and pottering,  
for reading and thinking,  
and writing,  
and talking.

A day, for some, of praying  
and singing,  
confessing and hoping,  
dreaming and planning,  
living  
in giving.

This day is your day, Lord.  
Share this day with me, Father.  
Let it also be my day,  
sun-rising-upon-me day,  
as well as your Son's rising day.

May I explore, today,  
the depths of re-creation,  
forming myself,  
and my life anew,  
in your eternal image,  
and through your graceful, saving love.

So let this day  
be our day, Lord.  
And may its stream run fresh  
through all the days of my years.

FOR SUNDAY

*Worship now*

Lord, worship is a strange activity  
 in this, the twenty-first century.  
 We know, only too well,  
 how to analyze and criticize,  
 to rationalize, and finalize.  
 The secrets of production and consumption,  
 of automation, cybernation, and organization,  
 are hidden from us no longer.  
 We can replace the human heart,  
 and set human feet upon the moon.  
 There is nothing we cannot harness and control,  
 except, it seems, ourselves.

So we come before you in worship:  
 a people all-sufficient,  
 yet strangely lacking,  
 a race infinitely powerful,  
 yet powerless to achieve true justice,  
 or peace, or truth.

Teach me the lesson  
 of this day that is ending, Lord.  
 Teach me to worship,  
 to know your presence,  
 to seek your forgiveness,  
 to become open to your power,  
 that power which is made perfect in weakness.  
 And in your power,  
 the power of love,  
 may I discover justice and peace,  
 and truth, and life.  
 Through him who was, and is,  
 the way,  
 the truth,  
 and the life.