

CELEBRATE LIFE

A Book Of Meditations



Paul Zacharias

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Swedenborg Press
Newton, Mass.

Copyright 1972
Second Printing 1981

ISBN: 0-87785-162-X
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number LC 79-93145

Cover design by Nancy Crompton

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PREFACE

Everything in life is born or created for some purpose. In all things, if we look long enough, we find a sense of history, a reason for being that transcends the object itself. So it is with this little devotional book.

The genesis of *Celebrate Life* is really quite simple. For many years now I have become increasingly convinced that God is alive and well; that His Divine Spirit permeates all of creation (which includes every individual—you, me, everyone); that God is a loving, approachable Friend with whom we can have a kind of personal relationship. If God is like this then obviously He knows each one of us, and in turn wants us to respond to Him. This is the only kind of God that makes any sense at all. I simply assume all of this is true; proof is neither necessary nor desirable. Let the wiser theologians and philosophers quibble over the finer points of doctrine.

Out of this growing conviction (that God is Real and Present in Life) these devotional

readings have struggled to the light of day. Essentially they are impressionistic pictures describing the way I feel about the most precious things around me: God, marriage, friendships, vocation, holy days, life and death. And most important, the daily stuff out of which life is made. What else is there?

I realize it is impossible to convey, adequately, feelings with words because emotion, by its very nature, defies and eludes rational thought. But try we must, and this applies both to the writer and the reader. All of which leaves you, the reader, with a certain responsibility—that being to recognize and respond to the mood evoked by the readings in your own way. What do these pages say to you of life—Your Life!

“If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is: infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern.” William Blake

Paul Zacharias

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THE CELEBRATION OF LIFE

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them."

Revelation 21:2, 3 (RSV)

We pray, O God, that we may be brought
back to the essentials of life.

It is so easy for us to become side-tracked;
how readily we follow our own ways!

But we know, deep down, that this is not
the best way.

Sometimes, dear Lord, we have a brief
glimpse of what would happen if hate
should really die, and misunderstanding
and envy and jealousy,
those biting, destroying things that kill
the body and the soul.

What a glorious world this would be—and
could be—

if we, each one of us,
could be caught up in a vision of the

kind of world

You have planned for all mankind.

A world in which there is genuine peace,
brotherhood, friendship; where there
is spontaneous laughter, and the sheer
joy of being alive fills the air; where
people look upon life as the most
wonderful gift of all.

In our hearts we know that this is the way
life is meant to be,
and we pray, each in our own way, that
we might be captured by this vision, so
that . . .

in our homes, at work, and at play,
in all the affairs of life,
we might live in such a way
that Your name is being glorified,
O Jesus Christ our Lord.

*“The world is still being created, and in the
world it is Christ who is being fulfilled.”
When I had heard and understood this say-
ing, I looked, and I saw, as though in an ec-
stasy, that all nature was immersed in God.*

Teilhard de Chardin

THE OPEN DOOR

“I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.” *Revelation 3:8 (RSV)*

Almighty God, our loving heavenly Father,
In this moment of quiet meditation
I turn to You with an eager, expectant and
grateful heart.

So many and varied are the thoughts that
troop through my mind like shrouded
pilgrims homeward bound.

I think back over the experiences of the
day, and perhaps over the past week,
and I recall those times,
infrequent, but nonetheless very real,
When I was aware of Your guiding hand in
my life,

Those times when I saw through the shell
surrounding all things, and for a brief
moment looked upon life as it really is
. . . those times when the guarded, tired
mask slipped away and I was able to
reach out and touch Reality.

It may have been the gesture of a hand
reached out in love, or an open look that
expressed more than words can ever say,
or a sense of awareness that bridged the
gap between another person and myself,
and for that fleeting moment we actually
felt as one.

For these best of all gifts,
Thank You, God.

*The overtones are lost, and what is left are
conversations which, in their poverty, can-
not hide the lack of real content. We glide
past each other. But why—Why?*

Dag Hammarskjöld

THE PILGRIM'S JOURNEY

But God said to him, "You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you; then who will get all of those things that you have provided?" So it is with the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. *Luke 12:20, 21*

My Lord and my God,
Look with mercy and favor upon us,
pilgrims on this endless journey of life.

We do not know where we are going.
We are ignorant of our future, sometimes
afraid of it.

Many times we are unsure of what to do,
or of what You would have us do.

And too often we are ashamed of the past.

No matter how much money we have, or
how much property we have,
it really doesn't mean anything.

We know down deep in the very depths of our
being; in that very special, secret place
which is the Kingdom of God within us,

We know that all we have is You.
Each one of us realizes that we are
at a particular place
on this pilgrim's road.

Help us, O Lord, to recognize where we are,
and what responsibilities and obligations
this present place,
the "here and now,"
demands of us.

Help us to see the truth,
of who we are,
and where we are,
and what is asked of us.

*To become free and responsible: for this
alone was man created, and he who fails to
take the Way, which could have been his,
shall be lost eternally.*

Dag Hammarskjöld

DIVINE INDIVIDUALITY

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1, 2 (RSV)

Our Father and our God,

In the arching silence of this time and place, we think to ourselves:

“What shall I say when I talk to You?”

for truly, You know us better than we know ourselves.

You know what we need long before we ask.

You know the mistakes and the wrong that we have done.

You know that, at times, we have been selfish, stubborn, and difficult to live with.

You know the “couldn’t-care-less” attitude we so often have for the person who is different; and perhaps this is the person who really needs us. And yet we walk right by, seeming not to notice.

You know the pretending we do with each other; the false images we so often project. If it weren’t so tragic it would

be funny, in a mixed-up sort of way.
You know the struggles that confront us,
the things we wrestle with, the things
that irritate and gnaw at us, and cause us
to be anything but confident and sure.

You know the things we run to, the
things we run after, and the tensions that
pull us apart and keep us from being
whole persons.

O God, what should we say when we talk
with You? Perhaps . . . the very best
thing we can do is thank You for know-
ing us—all about us—our strengths and
our weaknesses—our joys and our
sorrows—our life, our world,
our circumstances.

And even after You know us so completely,
still You love us and accept us, and seek
to give us hope and love and the guiding
spirit we need. The whole Design is so
wonderful.

“Thank You, God.”

The duty of Christian love is a command to each individual: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor.” It is a personal responsibility. No man may properly question the sincerity of another man’s good works. As S. Kierkegaard quaintly points out, a tree must be known by its fruits, but this does not mean that any tree may be critical of the fruits of other trees.

John Gates

LOOKING LIFE IN THE FACE

Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." *John 14:23 (RSV)*

Our Heavenly Father, the center and source
of our very being,

Present in this moment and in every
moment of our lives, the unseen listener
in every conversation, the strength for
every action of our bodies, the One to
whom all Life belongs,

Praise and Glory
reverberates through all Creation.

Forgive us, dear Father, when we try to
divide life; when we think that You are
present here in this time of prayer, but
not in our job or in our kitchen; when
we think that we can worship You on
Sunday mornings, and forget about You
on Monday through Saturday; when we
seek to rationalize and love only those
we choose to love, and forgive only those
who make it easy for us to forgive.

Forgive us, Divine Master, when we are unable to look life in the face; when we duck our heads so that we don't have to look into the pleading eyes of a neighbor who might need our help.

We confess that too often we are selfish and don't want to share ourselves without expecting something in return.

We recognize that sometimes we want to run from life and our responsibilities, from You, and from others.

Forgive us, Father, in our running, our selfishness, our forgetfulness, and for our unnecessary concern for ourselves.

O Lord of life—
Will You show us the Way?

Is life so wretched? Isn't it rather your hands which are too small, your vision which is muddied? You are the one who must grow up.

Dag Hammarskjöld

AS ONE WHO SERVES

“If I, your teacher and Lord, have washed your feet, you must be ready to wash one another’s feet. I have given you this as an example so that you may do as I have done. Believe me, the servant is not greater than his master, and the messenger is not greater than the man who sent him. Once you realize these things, you will find your happiness in doing them.” *John 13:14–17 (Phillips)*

O Lord,

In sermons, hymns and prayers,

in the Bible and in our Church teachings,

You have told us

that we must be You in the world today.

If there is going to be any action for good,

if there is going to be a new

history tomorrow,

then we, and millions of people

very much like us,

will have to take our Christian discipleship

very seriously.

O Lord, let us never forget this fact,

That we are You in the world today,

And never let us be afraid of it.

When someone, anyone, reaches out his
hand in need, let me grasp it.

So many people, young and old,
White, black, red, yellow, and brown,
asking, crying, pleading for help.

As Francis said,

“Make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, a pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is sadness, joy!”

*Only they are truly wise who learn that love
always lets go, makes no claim, and is con-
tent to love without being loved—for God is
Love, and all who love are saints of the
Most High.*

Joseph F. Newton

IN THE FLOW OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

*I believe that I shall see the goodness of the
Lord in the land of the living!*

*Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your
heart take courage;
yea, wait for the Lord!*

Psalm 27:13, 14 (RSV)

Dear Lord,

Be very close to all those
who this day have special need of You.

Prayerful thoughts surround those who are
sick in body, mind, or spirit.

And this includes all of us, because everyone,
in various ways,
is dis-eased.

Some more than others,
but we've all fallen short of the mark,
and the need to be made whole is with
us all.

There are those who are desperately lonely
and somehow lost in the shuffle of life;

We bring their names into Your presence,
and pray that we may be given insight as
to how we can help them discover the
riches of true friendship.

There are those who suffer almost constant
bodily pain,
or are tragically crippled, physically or
mentally.

Help them, and us, to understand,
Not so much WHY this happened; rather,
WHAT can I do about it, and
HOW best can I respond to it.

*The consolation of knowing that You are
where you are through God's Providence is
quite inexhaustible. While you have that,
nothing that is really harmful can touch
you.*

Fenelon

THE LIGHT OF HOPE

*And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.*

Joel 2:28 (RSV)

Eternal God, our Friend and Savior,
You know the feelings that well up in our
hearts as we face the unknown future.

If we look forward with high hopes and
eager expectations, grant that no failure
or lack of discipline on our part will
keep us from achieving our worthy goals.

If we look forward with doubts and fears,
uncertain that we can meet the demands
which life lays upon us, help us to
remember that there is nothing in life
that we must face or shoulder alone.

If we are haunted by the insecurities and
uncertainties of life, help us to find our
peace in committing ourselves and all
our ways into Your hands, in the certain
knowledge that whatever happens,
You will never leave us or forsake us.

If we have come to expect nothing, if we
have grown dull and pessimistic; and if,
in our hearts, there is a constant grudge
against others and ourselves,
kindle again within our hearts the light of
hope, and give us the faith to accept even
that which we can't understand.

O Lord, help us this day, where we are
right now, to look up . . . and around . . .
and within, that we may behold Your
glory,
Which is
our Way—our Truth—our Life.

*It's incredible how quickly time goes; my
whole spiritual life consists more and more
in abandoning myself actively to the pres-
ence and action of God. To be in commun-
ion with Becoming has become the formula
of my whole life. Teilhard de Chardin*

STATES OF BEING

“For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and salve to annoint your eyes, that you may see.”

Revelation 3:17, 18 (RSV)

Eternal God, our Lord and Savior,

Help me to use this period of meditation
as a time for dedicating myself to You
and the Way of Life before me.

(Can I make a distinction between
You and the Way of Life?)

I need so much Your Light and Your Love
if I am to meet life bravely and creatively.

Lord, how could I live without You?

For in You I live and move and have
my being.

I couldn't move a finger without Your
help—and yet,
how often do I live as if I belong
to myself!

And because I do make this mistake—a
common, human mistake—
I find myself in such trouble, doing such
foolish things;
things that only bring sorrow and sad-
ness, both to others and to myself.

Help me, then, to gather up all my problems
and my cares and weave them into one
fabric, and bring them to You with
my love,

Knowing that in Your presence these
burdens of life will become lighter.

*We must regard life as an infinite progres-
sion in which there are really no hardships
or trials or mishaps, but only experiences or
states of being . . . the idiom in which the
story is being written. Author Unknown*

INTROSPECTION

Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth. *Psalms 46:10*

Why is it so hard for us to be quiet, Lord?
You know that when we are quiet in
 Your presence,
 we feel uncomfortable and self-conscious,
Especially at first.
And it's the same way when we are in the
 presence of other people.
We are so conditioned by noise and tension,
 sound and fury, that silence
 bewilders us.
We don't seem to know what to do, Lord,
 when we are quiet. We become frightened,
 especially when we are alone.
Yet we remember that when You were with
 us on earth,
 You said that we should pray in quietness
 and secret, and that we are never alone
 because You are always with us.
Why is it that we have made life so hectic,
 Lord, and allowed it to be filled with
 busyness—the busyness of trivia
 and escape?

Why have we shied away from that which
gives it depth and meaning?

Why have we elevated the empty and the
hollow, while chipping away at those val-
ues for which You lived and died?

What is the trouble with us, Lord, that we
have mixed up our values and gotten
them out of focus?

Where are we heading, Lord?

Help us to find ourselves that we may find
You, and discover one another, and
come to know one another again.

Lord, help us to become part of Your
family, part of one another,
knit together,
bound together,
by ties of Christian love.

*God dwells wherever we let him in. This is
the ultimate purpose: to let God in. But we
can let him in only where we really stand,
where we live, where we live a true life. If
we help the divine to accomplish itself where
we live, then we are establishing, in this our
place, a dwelling for the divine presence.*

Martin Buber

THE GIFT OF LOVE

“This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this: that a man should lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I tell you to do.”

John 15:12–14 (Phillips)

O Lord, Source of all life,
Creator of everything that is,
The wonder of it all—

that we can read about You in the
Scriptures,
and what do we read!

That we are to love, and love,
and love again.

We are to be open . . . and free . . . and
vulnerable;

We are to be real . . . and joyous . . . and caring;
why?

Because You showed us the Way, the Truth,
and the Life.

You showed us how to love others,
especially ordinary, simple people
and little children,
the ones who see clearly without layer
upon layer of
“What will people say?” and
“What do people expect of me?”

You show us how to love.
You say: “Greater love has not man than
this, that a man give up his life for his
friends.”
And then You do just that.

*As man has as the end that which he loves
above all things; in each and all things he
has regard to this. It is in his will like the
hidden current of a river, which draws and
bears him away even when he is doing some-
thing else, for it is what animates him.*

Emanuel Swedenborg

LIVING WITH PEOPLE— INCLUDING MYSELF

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Matthew 6:19–21 (RSV)

O God,

Help me to see those faults that make
me difficult to live with.

You know, and I know, that I have them.

Nothing is gained by hiding my head in
the sand.

If I behave as if I were the only person
for whom life is difficult;

If I act as though I were the only one who
was ever disappointed, or the only person
who ever got a raw deal;

If I am too self-centered
or too full of self-pity;

Forgive me, O God,

If I am unable or unwilling to finish my
work once begun;

Or too impatient to listen to someone
who wants to talk with me;

Or if I brush aside the person who
 extends a helping hand;
If I secretly think that other people are
 fools and don't even try to conceal my
 contempt for them;
Forgive me, O God,
If I too often rub people the wrong way;
If I spoil a good thing by trying to ram it
 down someone's throat;
If I do things that get on people's nerves,
 and go on doing them
 even when I know better;
Forgive Me, O God.
Help me to work on these faults,
 and to do better in the days to come.

Continuing civilization presupposes mutual respect and understanding; it does not presuppose agreement. Even prior to this, we must overcome the massive mistrust in others and also within ourselves; this basic mistrust is so prevalent. People now assume that everyone else is untrustworthy . . . always trying to analyze the other's motives . . . so much so that we are apt to miss his real meaning.

Martin Buber

SONG OF THE BUTTERFLY

*For now we see through a glass, darkly, but
then face to face; now I know in part, but
then shall I know even as also I am known.*

1 Corinthians 13:12

My God,

I come before You alone,
an ordinary, average person.

I have abilities, and I have weaknesses,
I am full of contradictions and problems,
I have conflicts and worries.

Let me share some of these difficulties
with You.

There's

And

Also

You see what I mean?

But, over and above all of this,
I see myself as an important person,
a person with a magnificent, never-end-
ing potential,

Simply because I belong to You,
and You made me.

I know and believe with all my heart,
that You became Man, one of us,
and that You showed us the supreme
way, by living, and dying, and bursting
the bonds of death.

Thank You, dear Lord,
for this Divine lesson.

Let me never forget it.

*To exist in the fleet joy of becoming, to be
a channel for life as it flashes by in its gaiety
and courage, cool water glittering in the
sunlight—in a world of sloth, anxiety, and
aggression.*

Dag Hammarskjöld

COME IN AND WELCOME!

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not.

Isaiah 53:3

Our Lord and Savior,
True hospitality is never easy.

You learned that lesson the hard way,
from the manger to the cross.

Isaiah said: “Despised and rejected of men.”

I wonder why genuine hospitality is so
difficult?

Is it because

it means that we must learn to accept
each other at face value?

That we must learn to welcome Everyman
who comes to the door,
with open arms?

And if he who comes to the door
needs help
(And which of us doesn't!—)

Then we must try in each individual case
to bear this burden,
knowing all the while it will be heavy;
and we may even drag our feet.
It is not easy to open ourselves like this
and give ourselves away.

Perhaps Simon did not want to carry your
cross on the way to Golgotha,
but he did it anyway.

*Goodness is something so simple: always to
live for others, never to seek one's own ad-
vantage . . . In our era, the road to holiness
necessarily passes through the world of
action.*

Dag Hammarskjöld

LIGHT AND SHADOW

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:16–18 (RSV)

O Lord our God,
You have placed us upon this good earth.
In response, we want so much to be more
aware of Your presence in and around
us, urging us on to nobler things in life.
We pray that, in every way, You will be-
come increasingly more real to us;
in the beauty of nature,
in the warm relationships of family and
friends, in all that is excellent and
worthy, in victories of light over darkness,
love over hate, good over evil.
Become very real to us, O God.
Blessings from Your generous hand have
been richly bestowed upon us, like
streams flowing through our
common days,

and yet, too often we have been thoughtless and ungrateful, unmindful of the source of our lives.

Help us, O Lord, to become more aware of the ongoing miracle of life—seedtime and harvest, winter and summer, youth and old age, light and shadow. Everything comes from Your open hand, streaming trails of glory, and yet— Too often we are blind and deaf to the unfolding miracle and wonder of life. Dear Lord, open our eyes and our ears that we may see and hear.

We cannot always hope to remain in the I-Thou relationship, either with another human or with God. Oftentimes we have to just stand by, hoping and trusting that those “intimate” feelings will return. Therefore faith and love are not permanent states, but rather found and renewed, waited for and lived with, in a continual alternation of knowing and wondering, seeing and suspecting, believing and fretting, and believing once again.

Martin Buber

BUILDING THE KINGDOM

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying: Behold, the tabernacle of God is with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

Revelation 21:3

My God and Father,

I do not know what tomorrow will bring,
but that really isn't very important, is it?

What is important is now.

Help me to be more aware of the present
moment, for it is now, in this time and
place, that I am being given an opportu-
nity, and a challenge,

to transform earth and heaven

into the New earth and New heaven

That You promised would one day become

a living reality—

the only Reality.

I can't do very much.
Even all three billion of us, working together,
couldn't finish the job by ourselves.

But the fact remains that
the building up of the Kingdom
has to begin somewhere, sometime.

What better place, and time,
than right now!

With me.

Another opportunity has been given you this day—as a favor and as a burden. The question is not: why did it happen this way, or where is it going to lead you, or what is the price you will have to pay. It is simply: how are you making use of it? And about that there is only one who can judge.

Dag Hammarskjöld

THE REALITY BEHIND LOVE

By this we may be sure that we know God: if we keep his commandments. He who says, "I know him" but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected.

1 John 2:3-5 (RSV)

O Lord our God,
The message of love is woven throughout
the Bible,
Like a golden thread laced through fine
tapestry.

And yet,
Love is a word, and a concept,
that is so often misused . . . and abused.

Perhaps we are a little afraid of it,
because of what it might mean if we
really loved.

In our mind we know what love is:
it means concern for the other person,

a feeling of responsibility for the other;
it calls us to think about what is really
best for the people around us.

And as we express this kind of love,
it may not always be very nice,
or gentle, or kind,
because true love can be uncomfortable,
firm, and demanding,
and we're not used to this kind of love.

The trouble is, of course,
that we may think too much about love
and never really get around to loving;
maybe that is the saddest story of all.

*It is not usually some doctrine that prevents
us from becoming Christian, but rather the
fear of stepping out into Divine Light, the
fear of being seen through. H. Thieliicke*

SECONDS TICKING AWAY

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven . . . I have seen the business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind.

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 10, 11 (RSV)

Dear God,

seconds ticking away . . .

our life-time, moving out gradually into eternity . . . seconds, minutes, hours, days.

This very minute someone is breathing his last on this earth, some new life is being born, someone is plotting some horrible deed, someone is dreaming noble dreams, someone is acting heroically for You, God.

Others are praying,
and standing idly by,
and hating,
and loving.

So many millions of people in the world,
each one doing his own thing,
and all the while,
seconds are ticking away.

And how are we—you and I—
 spending our seconds?
Will the world be one step closer to
 brotherhood and peace
 because of us?
Will someone be led by the influence of
 our example, to make a choice for
 the better?
What about our homes? Our jobs?
 Our friendships?
How are we—you and I—
 using our seconds?
Which just keep on ticking
 away . . .

*And is not time even as love is, undivided
and paceless? But if in your thought you
must measure time into seasons, let each
season encircle all the other seasons, and let
today embrace the past with remembrance
and the future with longing.*

Kahlil Gibran

FOR THE FESTIVAL OF
THE CHRISTIAN HOME

*Behold, how good and pleasant it is when
brothers dwell together in unity!*

Psalm 133:1 (RSV)

Eternal God,

In this quiet moment we think
of the people we know,
living together as families.

We think of the homes we know,
including our own,
and can't help wondering how all these
families (including our own)
measure up to Your expectations!

We rejoice for those families where
a growing, responsible love
joins the members of the family
in an ever deeper love for one another
(in the process leaving space to breathe).
How incredibly beautiful and inspiring
is this scene!

We grieve that in other homes
the flame of love has been dampened—
in some cases, extinguished—

Where men and women still live together
as husband and wife in name only. Over
the years they have drifted apart.

Homes in which parents and children no

longer share life, but share only a common meeting place.
The utter, bleak sadness of a lifeless,
loveless home.
We pray for these families, dear God.
We think of the specific cases we know,
one by one.
And perhaps,
we may be led to help in some way.
We can't do everything, but maybe
we can just do one little thing
to help.

No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By the spiritual act of love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, he sees that which is potential in him, that which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he helps make these potentialities come true.

Viktor Frankl

THE WHOLE WORLD IS MY PARISH

And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee? And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it unto me." Matthew 25:39, 40 (RSV)

Our Father,

the lesson that we are our brother's keeper is, for some reason, hard to come by.

It is so easy for us to become wrapped up in our own little world; preoccupied with our all-important ambitions and plans—blind to the plight of other people, both near and far.

God—help us to lift ourselves out of ourselves.

Make us more aware . . .

of the person in the hospital who is in pain and facing an unknown future;

of the deprived teenager who has never really known

the love of a father or mother;

of the person who has become a slave to drink or to drugs;

of the thousands of young men all over the world who are caught up in the anguish of war;

of the millions of people in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East

who have no permanent home;

of the people in our own land who are
being ground up
in the relentless wheels of poverty
and despair;
of the persons we know who are being
plagued by
the loneliness of separation,
the burden of guilt,
the discouragement of failure,
the fear of the future.
We know, dear God, that You have promised
us, and all of Your children,
light enough and love enough
for every step of the way.
Meet us now . . .
at the place where we need you most.

Adam hides himself to avoid rendering accounts, to escape responsibility for his way of living. Every man hides for this purpose, for every man is Adam and finds himself in Adam's situation. . . . Religion is not some isolated element, but a life, and a teaching transmitted by life. It is man standing in the presence of God, man encountering the mystery in himself and others, living men and women endeavoring toward wholeness and the hallowing of all life, now and always.
Martin Buber

IT WONDERS ME

Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Old men and women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets."

Zechariah 8:4, 5 (RSV)

Dear Lord, in Your Word You tell us that
the saddest thing of all is
to have eyes and not see,
ears and not hear,
a spirit and not wonder.

We pray, God, that all of our senses become
more aware, that we may really experi-
ence the wonder of life all around us.

We are surrounded by wonders, if only
we have eyes that see and ears that hear.

Sunrise and sunset.

Snowflakes on my sleeve.

Sunlight patterned through gossamer
curtains.

Mobile designs of floating clouds and
swaying branches and flowing water and
grain bending before the west wind.

Books. Reading. Print. We can read. What
is more wonderful?

We don't have to think about reading and
writing.

Someone thought it all out for us long
ago—then we learned to read and write
in the first grade, and now this ability is
stored in us as in a computer.

Perfectly amazing!

Most of all it wonders me (what is your
biggest wonder?) that I awake
each morning.

That this tired and daily-abused body func-
tions busily through the night and is
refreshed and ready to go each morning.

Seemingly I do nothing to recharge my
body and brain.

But You and Your friends have been
busily at work,

and so I live anew each day,
this day and forever.

This indeed wonders me wonderful.

*A child's world is fresh and new and beauti-
ful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our
misfortune that for most of us that clear-
eyed vision, that true instinct for what is
beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and
even lost before we reach adulthood. If I
had influence with the good fairy who is
supposed to preside over the christening of
all children I should ask that her gift to each
child in the world be a sense of wonder so
indestructible that it would last throughout
life, as an unfailing antidote against the
boredom and disenchantments of later years,
the sterile preoccupation with things that are
artificial, the alienation from the sources of
our strength.*

Rachel Carson

MY HAND

And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Matthew 12:49, 50 (RSV)

Dear Lord,

This hand of mine is a marvelous thing
of flesh and bones.

A queer-looking object on close
examination.

It's flat, with five extensions radiating
from it.

Soft to touch, but underneath I can feel
bones and tissue.

With blood coursing to the very tips of
these fingers and back again.

It's all very strange.

I say "close up" and the fingers curl
into a fist.

I say "open" and they stretch out.

Nor do I have to say this aloud.

My fingers and hands obey my thoughts,
effortlessly and promptly.

And I must confess, God,
that I haven't the faintest idea
of how my hand works.

It just does, and for this I am grateful.
Tired hands regain their strength.
Torn skin heals in its own mysterious
fashion.
The sense of touch lets life flow in.
Sometimes I wonder why You made
that hand!
And why You put that hand on me!
There must be some good reason, I'm sure.
And gradually the reason is beginning
to sink in.
It's based upon the great variety of things
my hand can do:
It can build things—or it can destroy.
It can lift up—or push down.
It can heal—or it can hurt.
It can give—or it can get.
It all depends on how I use it,
a sometimes troubling dilemma,
Yes, indeed, Lord.

In the other life, those who touch one another communicate to each other the state of their life. If this is done with hands, the whole of the life is communicated.

Emanuel Swedenborg

FOR THANKSGIVING

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live;

*I will sing praises to my God while I have
being. Psalm 146:1, 2 (RSV)*

O God, our Father,

We thank You for the many things
that make life lovely;

For all the beauty of this world:

the incredibly soft warmth of a spring day,

For the graceful sweep of dunes,

the eternal mystery of a star-swept night,

For cloud-tipped mountains and

heather on the hill,

For all the loveliness of form and shape

and color of which this earth is so full,

We thank You, God.

For those who hope in us,

although we haven't always justified
their hopes,

For those who believe in us,

although we have sometimes failed them,

For those who forgive us,

even when we hurt them,

We thank You, God.

And for the unforgettable moments in
life—for those rare, precious, wonderful
moments when the burdens and worries
and tensions fall away from us,
and we feel at peace.

For moments of perfect understanding with
a friend,

For moments when we know the joy of
loving and being loved,

We thank You, God.

“Thank You” is hardly sufficient.

But it could be a start
in the right direction.

*The longer I live, the more my mind dwells
upon the beauty and wonder of the world.
I am in love with this world; by my consti-
tution I have nestled lovingly in it. It has
been home. It has been my point of outlook
into the universe. I have not bruised myself
against it, nor tried to use it ignobly. I have
climbed its mountains, roamed its forests,
sailed its waters, crossed its deserts, felt the
sting of its frosts, the oppression of its heats,
the drench of its rains, the fury of its winds,
and always have beauty and joy waited
upon my goings and comings.*

John Burroughs

ON A SUNDAY IN SPRING

“For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.”

Song of Solomon 2:11, 12 (RSV)

O Lord,

We are so glad this morning that we have
found our way to this service of
praise and thanksgiving.

As we sit here quietly and think
about Life and Faith and Love,
we are grateful for so many things.

Grateful for the warmth and love we
find reflected in the faces of our
friends this morning.

Thankful for this day of rest,
that after all the activities and con-
fusions of the week we can gather here
for this one hour.

What a glorious time is springtime,
when all the world is made new
with fresh life bursting out all
around us.

What a tragedy if we should miss the
lesson You would teach us with the
coming of Spring!

Even as the deadness of winter is being

transformed,
So may the warm breath of Your spirit
blow through and cleanse the dusty,
cluttered corners of our life.
Let our selfish desires and hateful
thoughts be swept out of our minds and
hearts by the purity of Your Presence.
Dear Lord,
it is not enough that we have spring for
the world, unless we have it in our
hearts too.
And now we bring everything we are and
want to become into Your Presence,
where it is so still,
and so very lovely.

*Go out into a garden and examine a seed;
examine the same plant in the bud and in
the fruit; and you must confess the whole
process a miracle, a perpetual miracle. It is
not the loam, nor the ploughshare, nor the
glare of sun that calls greenness from the
dust: it is the present power of Him who
said, "Seedtime and harvest shall not fail."
Needs there, my brethren, any other book
than this returning spring that reminds us
of the first creation, to suggest the Presence
of God?*

Ralph W. Emerson

ON MOTHER'S DAY

Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all."

Proverbs 31:25, 26, 28, 29 (RSV)

O Lord,

in the quiet beauty of this hour,
as we open our hearts to You in praise
and adoration for all the blessings of life,
especially for the love of mothers and
fathers, may we leave behind us, just for
a moment, all of our worldly difficulties
and cares, and become again, for a
short time, as a little child.

Help us to recapture some of the joy
and some of the enthusiasm
of our childhood,

When Mother was so very precious and
important in our lives
the very center of all our activities,
the last one to see us at night,
and the first one to greet us in
the morning.

Binding up our hurts,

wiping away our tears,
helping us, by word and example,
to walk along Your paths
of righteousness.

How can we best repay you, Mother,
for all you've meant to us?

Perhaps by rededicating ourselves
to the highest and best ideals
we know you dreamed for us,
long, long ago.

One learns to accept the fact that no permanent return is possible to an old form of relationship; and, more deeply still, that there is no holding of a relationship to a single form. This is not tragedy but part of the ever-recurrent miracle of life and growth. All living relationships are in process of change, of expansion, and must perpetually be building themselves new forms. But there is no single fixed form to express such a changing relationship. There are perhaps different forms for each successive stage; different shells I might put in a row on my desk to suggest the different stages of marriage—or indeed of any relationship.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh

A YOUNG MOTHER'S PRAYER

*Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator
of the ends of the earth.*

*He does not faint or grow weary, his under-
standing is unsearchable.*

*He gives power to the faint, and to him who
has no might he increases strength.*

Isaiah 40:28, 29 (RSV)

Dear God,

What a mess everything is

Here it is, nine o'clock.

The children still stirring restlessly,

coughing,

sniffling,

calling out,

First it's water.

Then the bathroom.

The whole evening wasted and nothing done.

I feel exhausted.

Overcome.

Wishing there were hope in sight,

light at the end of the tunnel.
If only I had someone to talk with,
 someone who would understand
 how I feel—
Oh, God,
 how can I get through all this?
If only I had someone to talk with,
 someone who would understand
 how I feel—
Oh, God, will You help me?
Let me see just the next step.
That's all I ask.

THE PRIOR CHALLENGE

If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder without any such gift from the fairies, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in.

Rachel Carson

ACCEPTING LIFE—ALL OF IT

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Colossians 3:12, 13 (Phillips)

Dear Heavenly Father,

As a wise Father you know us so much better than we know ourselves.

And so it is that, as we come into Your presence honestly, we begin to realize that our disguises and our defenses are gradually falling away.

In the searching, penetrating light of Your perfect Love and Wisdom, revealed to us in the Risen Christ, we begin to see ourselves for what we really are.

We acknowledge that too often we are anxious about the wrong things, about our own security, our own prestige.

And we see only too well how these misplaced concerns cripple our spiritual potential in life.

And so dear Lord, because we do want to
be worthy of Your faith in us,
we bring before you every doubt, every
resentment, every secret hatred.

And as we acknowledge our sins, to You
and to ourselves,

Help us to accept Your forgiveness
and give us a stronger faith in ourselves.

That we may be restored to a more complete
fellowship with You,

And a deeper understanding of what it
means to be a whole person
in Your sight.

*If only people would realize when they are
passing through a hard time, no matter how
hard, that they are merely passing through
a tunnel, and that to jump out of the train
in the middle of the tunnel neither mends
nor ends anything, but only adds to toil and
the tears, and postpones what is inevitable:
an ultimate re-emergence into light.*

H. Studdert-Kennedy

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

When Jesus heard these things, he said to him: You still lack one thing: sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful; for he was very rich.

Luke 18:22, 23

Our Lord and Divine Master,
There is a cost to being a follower
of Yours.
There is a cost to being a whole person.
There is a cost—a risk—
in just being alive.
True, we didn't ask to be born,
but now we are here,
in this particular time and place.
And we want so much to make the
most of ourselves,
which is only possible
with Your help.
We do thank You, God, for this life
of ours,

even though sometimes, many times,
we express our gratitude very poorly.

But over the years we're beginning
to see that Life is Love,
and Love is Life.

We can't separate the two.

And the only way that we can show love,
the only way that we can grow in love,
is to love.

Then we find You,
here, there, everywhere,
living, breathing, Life itself.

The First and Last, the All in All.

*There are a good many things which would
not be worth bothering about if I were going
to live only 70 years, but which I had better
take very seriously if I am going to live for-
ever.*

C. S. Lewis

AT EVENTIDE

*And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
and come to Zion with singing,
with everlasting joy upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

Isaiah 35:10

O God our heavenly Father,

Help us to make the noblest use of mind
and body in our advancing years.

As you know full well, so often the spirit
is willing but the flesh grows weak.

And so, according to our waning strength,
apportion our work.

Even as You have pardoned our trans-
gressions, sift the ingatherings of our
memory that evil thoughts may cease to
plague us; that goodness and truth may
shine through ever more clearly.

We thank You for Your gifts,
especially for Your abiding presence
with us, and the love of friends on both
sides of the veil.

Grant us new ties of friendship,
new opportunities of service,
joy in the growth and happiness of
children, clear thought, and a saving,
radiant faith.

Teach us to bear infirmities with cheerful
patience.

Keep us from narrow pride in outgrown
ways, from blind eyes that will not see
the good of change.

Let Your Divine peace rule our spirits
through all the events of life.

Help us to face creatively all fears,
fear of life and fear of death,

That with glad hearts we may carry out
Your will concerning us,
O Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Our lives are never left to themselves alone.
Always we are visited. An idea . . . new
energy . . . memories . . . our common heri-
tage. . . spiritual resources. Always we are
being visited.*

H. Thurman

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David; blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest! And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?

Matthew 21:9, 10

Lord, what strange, unsettled feelings surge
through our minds and hearts
as we think about the message of
Palm Sunday,

This message, which is eternally new
and challenging.

Help us to see Palm Sunday
and feel it,
as it comes to us today.

If,
through indifference or ignorance,
we have kept You outside the walls
of the place where we live,
outside the gates of the temple

where we worship;
off the paths we walk each day,
have mercy upon us.

We would have no part in that sin
which welcomes You on holy days
and then crucifies You every day
in the marketplace,
in our homes,
in life unlived.

Help us, O Lord,
to keep our path straight,
to make ready Your road.

That You may ride in triumph this Sunday
morning into the very center of our being.

*The thing is to understand myself, to see
what God really wishes me to do; the thing
is to find a truth which is true for me; to
find the idea for which I can live and die.*

Kierkegaard

THE TRIUMPH OF MAUNDY THURSDAY

“I am not going to leave you alone in the world—I am coming to you. In a very little while, the world will see me no more but you will see me, because I am really alive and you will be alive too. When that day comes, you will realize that I am in my Father, that you are in Me, and I am in you.”

John 14:18–20 (Phillips)

Dear Lord,

As we come into Your presence on
Maundy Thursday, we think of what
happened to You on this night
many centuries ago.

It seems as if it was only yesterday that we
remembered the light of a star that
shone upon a manger, and the gentle
arms of a mother who lovingly
embraced You.

But this night we recall that the only
light to pierce the darkness
was the light of torches.

And the only hands laid upon You were
those of the soldiers who came to
arrest You and take You away.

And then You suffered the mental
anguish of having one of Your friends
betray You; others denied You and fled.

Then You accepted the cup of death
that did not pass from You
as You knelt in the garden.

We are grateful, much more than words
can say,
that You had the strength to endure
and the will to be victorious over death.

O God, help us to be true to You;
we would not betray You in any way,
but we need so much help, every step
of the Way.

Let us also see, ever more clearly,
what Your life and death and resurrection
really means to us
and to the whole world.

It is a sham to pray to God to “cleanse the thoughts of our hearts,” when all too often we want nothing of the kind, and resent concrete approaches toward accomplishing this end. Do we really want to know the truth about ourselves? Austin Pardue

FOR EASTER

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"
John 11:25, 26 (RSV)

O Risen Lord,
On this glorious Easter day,
 what can we say
 that will have any meaning?

Words, words, words,
 all so insignificant and pale
 when compared with
THE REALITY OF THE EVENT.

Your body was bruised and broken,
 left on a cross to die,

Then lovingly placed in a fresh tomb
 in a garden,
 where strange and wonderful things
 happened, where Perfect Love trans-
 formed flesh and bones into pure
 Divine substance.

We can't understand
 or explain everything, dear Lord—
 we don't have to.

Instead we celebrate the fact that
You are alive forevermore,
and because You Live
we can live too.

Teach us this mighty lesson, Lord;
send us out into the world
like the disciples of old
who were afraid of nothing,
not even death itself,
because they had seen You,

THE CHRIST OF THE EMPTY TOMB.

When our body is no longer able to perform its functions in the natural world, but is separated from our spirit, which is called dying, we still continue to be ourselves and to live. We ourselves live, because we live not from the body but from the spirit, since it is the spirit which thinks and loves in us, and thought with affection makes us what we are.

Remember, friend, that everyone is born for heaven; and that they are received into heaven who receive heaven in themselves while in this world. Emanuel Swedenborg

ON CHRISTMAS EVE

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Matthew 1:23

Blessed Lord Jesus,
Give us receptive and thankful hearts
 this Christmas Eve
 for our choicest gift,
 our dearest Guest,
 the birth of Your spirit in our hearts.

Let not our souls be like busy, noisy
 inns that have no room for You,
 but rather, quiet homes of prayer and
 praise, where You may find
 fit company.

Where the needful cares of life are
 wisely ordered and put away,
 and wide spaces kept open for You;

Where holy thoughts pass up and down,
and fervent longings watch and wait
for that gentle knock
in the darkness of night.

And so, dear Savior,
when You come bearing the gift of
eternal life, may You find all things
ready, and we, Your friends, waiting
for no new Master,
but for One long known and loved.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

*I thank Thee, God, and like a child
Rejoice as for a Christmas gift,
That I am living—just alive—
Mattias Claudius*

A CHRISTMAS GIFT

At the beginning God expressed himself. That personal expression, that word, was with God and was God, and he existed with God from the beginning. All creation took place through him, and none took place without him. In him appeared life, and this life was the light of mankind. The light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out.

John 1:1–5 (Phillips)

O God our Father,
We thank You for the memories, the
 hopes and the blessings that come to us
 wrapped up in Christmas,
For gifts given and received,
For family gatherings, past, present,
 and future,
For news and good wishes from friends
 near and far.
We thank You, O God,
For the spirit of good will which is all
 through the land,
For this time when we remember
 that it is more blessed to give
 than to receive,

For this time when we find our greatest
happiness in bringing happiness to others.

We thank You, O God.
And as You know only too well,
for many people this is a difficult time.

Be with those who are aged and alone,
and who live only with their memories.

Be with those who have lost loved ones this
past year, who, at Christmas time,
are very conscious of the one who
is not there.

Bless those who are poor and who are hurt
by their poverty,
not for their own sakes,
but for the sakes of the gifts they long
to give, and cannot.

O God,
Make this a time when those who have
quarreled will be reconciled again.

Make this a time when those who have
drifted apart will find each other again.

And above everything else, O God,
at Christmas time we give You thanks
for Your greatest and best gift to us:
Yourself.

FOR THE NEW YEAR

And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." And he said to Me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life."

Revelation 21:5, 6 (RSV)

Dear God,

with mercy look upon us as we stand
today at the place where the old year
meets the new.

We look back at the days that have been
and recall with grateful appreciation
the gaiety and laughter,
the sacredness of love,
the comradeship of friends,
the good times we've had.

For all of these heartwarming memories
we thank You. Without them life
would be nothing.

At the same time we look back and find
that many memories are not so pleasant.
Squandered opportunities,
broken promises,

wasted hours,
too many surface relationships.
These recollections haunt our hearts.
Forgive us, dear Father, then help us to
forget and to move on.
We don't want to enter into the New Year
burdened with these old ways and
old mistakes.
The future lies just ahead.
The present is here now.
What are we waiting for?

Men who face death discover that the precious things which come to mind in moments of peril are homely and unspectacular. They remember untroubled hours spent with friends. They remember their loved ones. They remember special moments which dropped unexpectedly into their daily lives, and which, when one looks back on them, seem like gracious gifts from heaven. And they know that it is only through entering into daily life as it comes, its joys and miseries, its accomplishments and frustrations, that one can ever be ready for eternity.

David Roberts

ETERNITY IS NOW

*Neither shall you say, Lo here! or, lo there!
for, behold, the kingdom of God is within
you. Luke 17:21*

Eternal Father of all mankind,
I suppose that in time there will be
one fold and one shepherd.

But until then, like in Old Testament times,
we are walking through a wilderness.

Help us to realize that this is where we are,
that life here is a balance
between heaven and hell.

This is the way it is.

And yet, at the same time,
isn't it true, as John tells us,
that there will be a new heaven and
a new earth?

Or is he saying that this new Heaven
and new Earth
has already begun,
if only we have eyes to see it?

Just look out of the window
of your home, or car, or soul,
and see what's really there!

It's here. We're in it. Heaven's all around.
Eternity doesn't start at the moment of death.

Whatever gave us that idea?

It's already started.

This is it.

And if we can't see it, or hear it, or feel it,
then maybe it's time to start worrying.

*The light died in the low clouds. Falling
snow drank in the dusk. Shrouded in silence,
the branches wrapped me in their peace.
When the boundaries were erased, once again
the wonder: that I exist.*

Dag Hammarskjöld

