

PRAYER



TEN DAYS OF PRACTICE

Brought to you by

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Illustrations by

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Releasing children from poverty
Compassion
in Jesus' name

Introduction

SINCE 1952, COMPASSION HAS BEEN CONNECTING people like you and me with kids in some of the toughest places on Earth. One of the most vital aspects of that connection has been prayer. Prayer changes the lives of sponsored kids as well as the lives of sponsors. Scott Erickson (illustrator) and I sincerely hope this offering enriches the long tradition of prayer and prayerfulness that marks the Mission of Compassion International.

My earliest memory of anything having to do with prayer is kneeling next to my mom's bed, trying to prop up a porcelain Jesus statue on her bedspread. Problem was, every time I thought I had set him upright, he'd fall over. I'd fold my hands and close my eyes to pray, only to be interrupted by the light thump of Jesus hitting the mattress. I don't know how many times I heard that "thump," but as I remember I didn't get to actually pray. See, I couldn't set things up correctly.

Maybe that sounds familiar to you.

I've done the same thing with so much else in my life; let the mechanics of something upstage and overshadow its essence. In this case, I thought I needed all the right pieces in all the right places so that I could pray. Instead of seeing those pieces as helpful, I made them essential.

I was like a thirsty man who had only ever seen water in clear glass and would not, regardless of how thirsty he was, drink from anything other than glass. The method of delivery can be very helpful but the bottom line is that I'm thirsty and need a drink of water, regardless of how I get it into my body.

Allowing mechanics to upstage essence is really problematic. Once I'm thrown off by my mechanics, I too readily abandon things I probably need; things I know are essential to my life as I'm living it.

You see, I pray because I am human, not because I'm religious.

An essential element of my Human Nature points beyond my Human Nature and even beyond Nature itself. Some deep, primal thing in me prompts and leads

me to look for and talk with God. Religious traditions can and do help with language for that need in me, but the compulsion to connect with God doesn't come from those traditions. Allowing mechanics to take a backseat to the essential nature of prayer, I can receive the language and imagery of tradition as a gift rather than an obligation.

REGARDING THE SHORT WORD-PRAYERS:

As an author, storyteller and songwriter, I work to create language for people to live more completely. In a sense, I am giving back a gift that was given to me. Over and over in life, I've often needed other people's words to see my own soul when the words I had on hand weren't sufficient. From Henri Nouwen to Andy Crouch to Anthony Bradley or my mom, the gift of others people's language has been like borrowing a container from another person so I could pour my life into it.

May the language here be that same kind of gift to you.

REGARDING THE CONTEMPLATIVE IMAGERY:

Scott and I are inviting you to do more than simply look at a few words and pictures and then agree or disagree. We are inviting you to pray. We designed these prayers as a way of inviting you to contemplate your own life, the lives of those you love and the presence of God in, through and around all of it. That kind of contemplation takes what Scott likes to call "an excavation of the soul" — the kind of digging made more possible by an engagement with good visual art.

Scott has often been asked what his paintings mean. And while questions of intrinsic meaning can be interesting, I think a better question is "What does the art draw out of you?" Henri Nouwen recounts how he excavated his own experience by taking a long look at Rembrandt's "Return of the Prodigal Son" in a book bearing the same name, and shares in detail the ways Rembrandt, from a few hundred years away, worked him overtime, unearthing pieces of his soul in need of repair as well as many Henri saw God had pieced together already.

May the imagery here and be that same gift to you.



*May I no longer be disappointed that other people
are not as I wish they were,
since I am not the person I wish I was.*

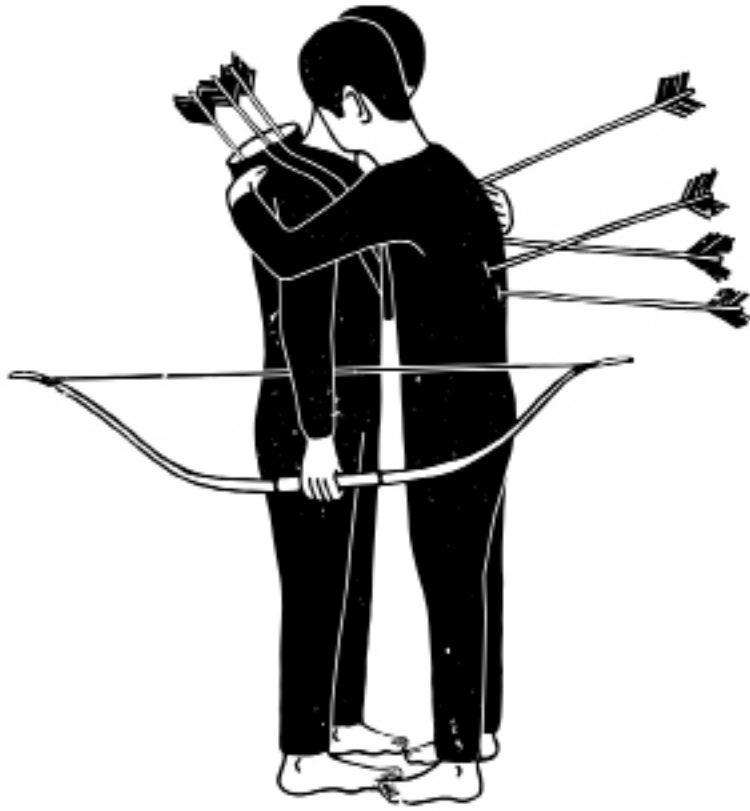


*May I be the same in character and posture
regardless of my circumstances.*

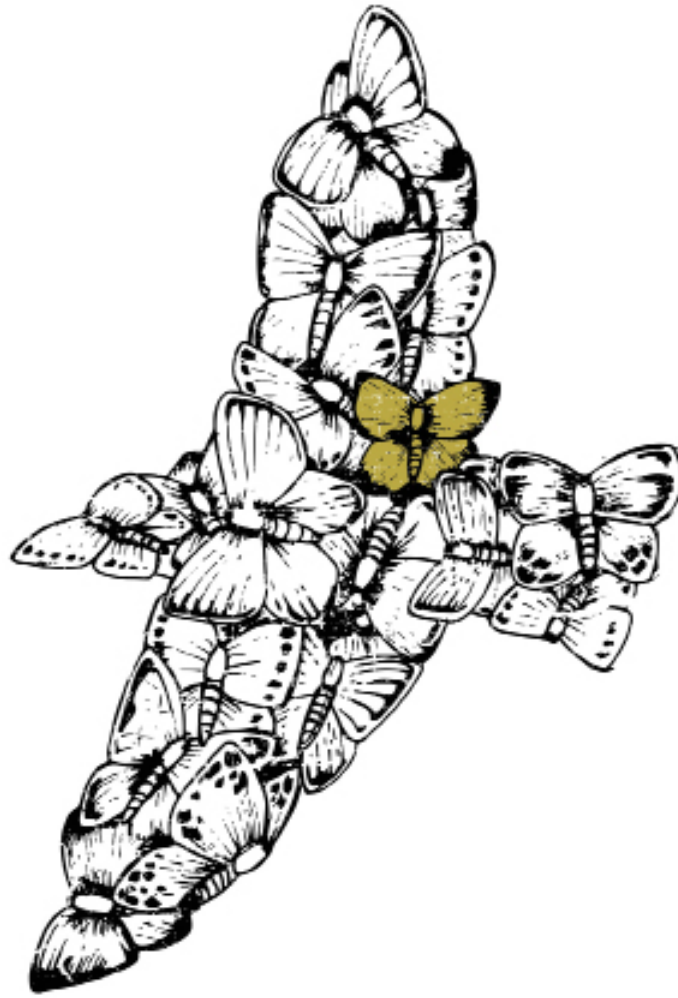
May I be an uncompromisingly whole person.



*May I have the eyes to see this world as a good place;
a world in need of love and restoration,
rather than being a bad place and an obstacle to
my peace and rest.*



*Let my love and forgiveness be less optional,
more consistent
and more recognizable.*



*May I take joy in the great deeds
and works of others, even knowing
I am not the source of them.*



*May my disappointments open the door to hope
and the desire to work for a better future
instead of leading me to frustration and
detachment.*



May I not tire of starting over.

May I not tire of helping others start over.

*My hope is and has always been in renewal
and resurrection.*



*May the work of my life be a fruit of who I am
rather than justification of my identity.*



*May I have the courage to fail,
even at work that matters to me.
May I know that mistakes are never
the end of my process though
they are a key part of it.*



May I live like newness is possible.