

saint mary's press

TURN INTO THE WIND

PRAYERS AND
REFLECTIONS BY
COLLEGE STUDENTS

EDITED BY SHIRLEY KELTER

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PREFACE

In the fall of 1997, Saint Mary's Press invited students from colleges and universities throughout the United States to submit prayers, poems, or reflections on their favorite Scripture passages for this publication. Students responded enthusiastically, and several professors sent in bundles of reflections, products of a class assignment. From the many submissions, these one hundred seventeen were selected because they expressed a variety of ideas, emotions, spiritualities, and issues relevant to young adults.

For over fifty years, it has been the mission of Saint Mary's Press to bring the good news to young people and, whenever possible, to draw on the gifts of our audience, especially the young writers and artists. We are grateful to all the students who participated in this project and to the many instructors, campus ministers, and chaplains who supported our effort.

COURAGE, SURRENDER, SPIRIT

Turn Into the Wind is filled with stories of courage. The prayers, poems, and reflections offered in this book address the issues and concerns flying at college students—sometimes like a gentle wind, sometimes like a hurricane: pressures, expectations, passions, fears, doubts, complicated relationships, newfound independence, hopes, and dreams. A recurring message that I hear from the student writers is this: Don't run away or shrink from these issues. Rather, have courage and turn into them—face them head-on.

Turn Into the Wind is filled with stories of vulnerability and surrender. One student wrote, “It’s hard to be chosen . . . to turn into the wind that blows my mask away.” To be “maskless” is to be vulnerable. It takes great courage to surrender our masks, to expose our real selves. College is an ideal time to take such a risk, to try on our real selves, to be true to ourselves and others. This is what growing in integrity is all about.

Turn Into the Wind is filled with stories of God. The Hebrew term for spirit is *ruah*, meaning “wind,” understood sometimes as the breath of Yahweh—the life-giving element. Each writer in this book has shared part of his or her soul—the very breath of God swirling or rushing within. Readers are invited to turn toward God, who dwells in their own sacred space.

ENTERING PRAYER

This book seeks to engage you in dialog with God. Following are a few ideas for using the book that might enrich your prayer experience.

SAVOR THE WORD OF GOD

Don’t rush through this book, but try to take it a page at a time, maybe a page each day. Find a chunk of uninterrupted quiet time for yourself, and begin by closing your eyes and simply breathing deeply, letting go of any tension or anxiety you might be feeling. Let yourself be aware of God’s presence, and rest comfortably

in that peace and stillness. Come to your prayer with an open mind, heart, and will.

When you feel calm and centered, read the Scripture passage on the page you've chosen. Read it slowly, say it aloud if you can, linger on the words, and let them seep into you. Perhaps a word or phrase jumps out at you; sit with it for a minute or two and let it reach into you. Is a question being asked in the quote? Read it as though it were addressed to you. How would you answer? Remember, the Bible is not simply a history book but the living word of God. It is meant for us, today.

If you enjoy writing, you may wish to keep a journal of your reflections or to write directly on the page you're reading. Underline or highlight the words that are meaningful, and add your own. Jot down a feeling you have as you read the Scripture passage, or a question that surfaces. Write the name of a person the passage brings to mind, or someone who is especially in need of prayer today.

CONSIDER THE REFLECTION OFFERED

Other college students have spent time with these same Scripture verses, and they share their reflections with you in this book. Their thoughts might be quite different from yours, and you could gain a new insight through their words. Explore how the truths they express speak to your truth—your experiences, questions, and beliefs.

GATHER TWO OR MORE

Consider gathering a group of friends for faith sharing, using this book as a tool. Begin with quiet time for centering. Have one person read the selected passage aloud, then spend a few more minutes in silence for personal reflection. Those who wish to can share their thoughts with the group and discuss implications of the passage. Then read the writer's reflection, and continue the discussion. Perhaps the group will want to take some action in response to what they have shared. For example, each person might agree to read that passage daily until the next time the group meets. Or each person may decide to write a note or letter to someone who could benefit from receiving this passage. A group might commit to some expression of justice in response to a passage that challenges them to live authentically the Gospels.

At the end of the discussion, the group could offer prayers of petition and thanksgiving, say the Lord's Prayer together, and share a sign of peace with one another.

Community enriches prayer. Find ways to pray together that help you grow as soul-companions.

BLESSINGS

As the editor of this book, it has been a privilege to be invited into the depths of these students' spirits where God dwells, swept up in

the wind that is God's spirit and that reaches into my own soul.

As you encounter God in this book, may you gain clear insights, bold vision, fresh hope, and a renewed faith from the reflections and stories offered by your peers. Blessings upon each of you as you journey through these rich and adventure-filled years of college.

Shirley Kelter
Editor

REFLECTIONS

WE KNOW that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

(Romans 8:28)

Oh, how the days passed—
Here I lived without really being aware.
So many sunrises and sunsets gone by and
My life remained harmonious and undisturbed.
Unknowingly, I forgot to thank God for all
those perfect days—
The mornings that flowed smoothly into night,
And the nights that invited a peaceful slumber.
But now I am faced with hardships—
Every morning has turned into an obstacle,
And the quiet sleep is all but absent.
It would be easy to cry to God, “Why me?”
But would God not think me foolish?
For when that good fortune slipped by,
Not once did I ask, “Why me?”
Whether our lives be full of splendor or tragedy,
God forever reminds us that
Everything happens for a reason.
As long as we live in the light of God,
And thank God for all our days,
Unending love and comfort is ours.
All God asks is that we trust.

Christine Melko
Viterbo College
La Crosse, Wisconsin

TRUST IN THE LORD *with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.*

*In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.*

(Proverbs 3:5–6)

Many of us are rapidly approaching graduation, and I am often struck by feelings of both excitement and apprehension: excitement about change and the vast opportunities that lie ahead, and apprehension about the many choices that will inevitably have to be made.

This verse from Proverbs is so encouraging! I find it to be the epitome of faith that God calls us to. How easy it can be for us to read past such promises without stopping to take them to heart. I'm not advocating that we take these verses to an extreme and not apply for a job or further schooling—that would be ridiculous. However, we can reflect on these words and hide them in our heart, letting God's word be a constant source of strength when we are faced with times of uncertainty and anxiety.

Jennifer Elam
Saint Mary's University of Minnesota
Winona, Minnesota

COME TO ME, *all you that are weary and
are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*
(Matthew 11:28)

Oh, God! I come to you with a heavy, weary heart and mind. I am so busy at school—with classes, meetings, exams, papers . . . I could go on! Even when I go to Mass, I cannot shut my brain off. I constantly have things running through my head: I forgot to call this person back, set up this meeting, finish that paper.

God, grant me a sense of peace. Allow me to shove aside all those concerns that crowd my heart and keep me from opening the door to you. Enter into my heart and mind and surround me with stillness. Grant my whole being a sense of calm so I can be more focused on you. Then I can stop worrying and realize that all I need in my life is you.

Molly Buettner
University of Scranton
Scranton, Pennsylvania

TAKE CARE! *Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.*

(Luke 12:15)

We college students always have so much on our mind. We worry about papers, tests, deadlines, school events, friends, and money. During my five years of college, I have had many jobs to support myself. Between the stresses of studying and making enough money to eat my next meal, I have often wished that I had a full-time job and was done with college.

Now as I am finishing my senior year, I am still broke, I will be in debt for years to come, and I drive a car that is older than I am—but something else is different. I'm happy for who I am and what I have done. I've had so many great experiences over the last five years that I would not trade for any amount of money. I met a lot of people, had great times, and, most important, I learned who I am and what I want out of life. This is what college is really about—learning for tomorrow and living for today!

Krista Kathryn Webb
Viterbo College
La Crosse, Wisconsin

JESUS SAID TO THEM, *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.*

(John 6:35–38)

The key weighs heavy in my hand.
I have not opened this door since happier days.
Seeing the familiar cracked frame and scars in
the wood carries me back.
What I have been searching for
is behind this gateway.
I have left it hidden, . . .
Allowing myself to destroy and be destroyed,
Finding all other ways to fill the hole.
That is why I am here;
There is nothing more of me.
Calling calling . . .
His voice is a constant echo in my ears.
Come to me,
But I resist,
Knowing I will have to give myself,
But I am lost.
So I offer myself up.
The key clicks in the keyhole,
and the door swings open.

The Lord is there, where he has always been,
Waiting for me.
I am home.

Lisa Marie Rose Brandt
Saint Mary's University of Minnesota
Winona, Minnesota

EVERY DAY, *as long as this today lasts, keep encouraging one another so that none of you is hardened by the lure of sin.*

(Hebrews 3:13, NJB)

College is a time of rapid growth and change. From the time we first arrive on campus until the time we leave, we are confronted by opportunities, and sometimes demands, for change.

But not all change is good, not all opportunities should be welcomed, and not every demand should gain our assent. As Christians we live *in* the world but are not *of* the world. We are called to struggle daily in our efforts to live out our faith.

Amid this struggle is the temptation to sin. Sex outside of marriage, drug and alcohol abuse, and cheating to pass a course are not the only ways we can betray our faith on campus. Anger, gossip, envy, uncharitable behavior toward faculty and fellow students, and skipping Sunday Mass are far more common sins that harden our heart and turn us away from God.

Standing alone against these temptations only invites failure. We must join together in prayer, and daily encourage one another to lead faithful lives while it is still today.

Will Ferguson
Saint Vincent College
Latrobe, Pennsylvania

THEN THE LORD GOD *formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.*

(Genesis 2:7)

Lord, look on me with tenderness.
Have mercy on me.
Be my shade and my sun,
my solace and my smile
as I strive to surrender myself to you,
making my soul supple to your spirit,
to your hands which continually create me.
I try to cooperate with you,
accepting myself as I am now
and looking forward to the person
whom I have yet to become.
As you provide opportunities for me to grow,
I reconcile myself with the uncertainty
that comes with change,
and I concentrate on birthing myself
into a new maturity,
a new and better “me,”
which is the reward of my struggles.
I pray that I may always invest
complete trust in you,
knowing that with your gentle hands
molding me and providing direction for my life,
I have nothing to fear.
I know that the potholes of the soul
are bound to surface
when I least expect them to—
times when my weaknesses
manifest themselves

through my human stumblings—
but with you, dear God, by my side,
insulating me with your peace,
I have the hope
that I will not grow discouraged,
but will only be inspired to serve you
with my whole heart and my whole soul,
more and more every day,
until my days become one
in eternity
through your gift of salvation.
Amen.

Jennifer Dudeck
Douglass College, Rutgers University
New Brunswick, New Jersey

JUST AS YOU DID IT *to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.*

(Matthew 25:40)

Last summer I had the opportunity to volunteer in Santa Catarina, Mexico, for seven weeks. There a team of seven other students and a priest lived and worked at a home for poor young boys who came from broken homes, other orphanages, or the street. Their hearts cried out for many things, even though their physical needs were now being satisfied. We didn't come to build them a school or to teach them English. We came to be friends and role models. The bonds we formed cannot be broken by distance—we shared in their meals, sports, games, studies, and their Eucharist. We climbed volcanoes, played cards, took walks, had long conversations with them. We did all of this in Christ's name. I have never so fully believed that I had looked Christ in the eye, shared a laugh with him, wiped a tear off his face, and embraced him in friendship and love.

We truly are all one body in Christ.

Molly Buettner
University of Scranton
Scranton, Pennsylvania

CAST ALL YOUR ANXIETY *on him,*
because he cares for you.

(1 Peter 5:7)

There's only one who knows . . .

how I truly feel,
if I'm happy or sad;

One who understands
that I can be both at the same time.

There's only one who really knows . . .

my pains and fears;

One who can comfort both in a special way.

There's only one who knows . . .

all the things that happen to me
and all that I feel;

One that makes me all that I am.

There's only one who knows . . .

that sometimes I doubt his presence
and feel all alone;

One who is always with me.

There's only one who knows . . .

that I do not need to try all kinds of tricks,
knock and knock,
or even yell to get his attention;

One who will come . . . if only I ask.

Malinda Kesteloot
University of Northern Iowa
Fort Dodge, Iowa

AS GOD'S CHOSEN ONES, *holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

(Colossians 3:12–14)

We face difficult decisions every day. How we react to those difficult situations determines who we are as human beings: we can simply follow the law and customs of our culture, or we can live above and beyond these acceptable norms.

Saint Paul clearly tells us what is expected of us as Christian people: we are called to compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Incorporating these virtues into our life is hardly an easy task. Perhaps that is why Saint Paul chooses to include the notion of forgiveness. Forgiveness is not a gift that is always given freely and easily, but it is necessary if we are to attempt to live a Christian life.

Saint Paul offers the purest way to leading a Christian life— “Clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” We are not perfect, but we can have hope that by incorporating love into our life, we can grow closer to being the person—and community—that God has called us to be.

Jill Arens
Saint Mary's University of Minnesota
Winona, Minnesota

†HEREFORE, *since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.*

(Hebrews 12:1)

Recently I found myself in the midst of a difficult crisis. A friend suggested that I read about Hannah in the First Book of Samuel, and I took great comfort from her story. I also remembered other stories of people who had cried out to a faithful God in the midst of personal suffering. Some were biblical stories, others were written memoirs of famous Christians past and present, and still others were stories told to me by friends.

This brought to mind the “great . . . cloud of witnesses” from Hebrews. My cloud of witnesses includes those people whose stories I store up in my heart and take comfort from in times of distress. My faith, my ability to “run with perseverance the race that is set before” me, is intricately tied up in this community of faith. During my recent crisis, the cloud of witnesses became very real to me. At the same time that I felt deep emotional pain, God gave me a strong sense of all those who had gone before—walking with me, passing me gently from one to the other, seeing me safely to my destination of healing.

Susan E. McNitt
Boston University
Boston, Massachusetts

MY GOD, MY GOD, *why have you
forsaken me?*

*Why are you so far from helping me, from the
words of my groaning? . . .*

But you, O LORD, do not be far away! . . .

*Future generations will . . . proclaim his
deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.*

(Psalm 22:1,19,30–31)

My God, my God, why have I forsaken you?

Why am I so far from your ways?

Oh, my God, I know your love
and your magnificence.

Day and night I cry out,
not to you, O God,
but to the still of the earth.

In times of deepest despair I sink,
then my eyes are drawn to the light.

You were here, right here with me,
even when I placed you second in my longing.

I have trusted you all my life.

I praise your name in hopes of the future,
that I may call on you in the very moment
of sorrow or joy.

For it is you who lives within me,
strengthening me.

You will provide,
for you have done it.

Michelle Yvette Bissman
Lycoming College
Williamsport, Pennsylvania

ἸESUS ALSO SUFFERED *outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured.*

(Hebrews 13:12–13)

A year ago I stood in the crowded Philadelphia airport clutching my sister's hands so tightly that sweat rolled off onto the sleeves of my winter jacket. The world felt moist as my eyes released heavy, warm tears onto my cheeks. It hurt. My vision blurred the signs marked Gate E4 and Now Boarding as the figures of my parents and my brother drifted farther away from me. They disappeared beyond the gate that led to the plane, leaving my sister and me behind, desperately alone.

I have wept days and nights for my loss. But it's about more than saying good-bye to my parents as they returned to West Africa. It's about losing a piece of myself as well. I have no family to share my dreams with. I have no one to cry to. I have no home. I stand with my feet planted in the soft earth beneath me, pausing in my journey up the hill of life. I turn to see my past lying beneath me: my childhood in Nigeria, my deep love for my family, the inevitability of coming to the United States for college and leaving home behind. Suddenly, without my family by my side, I feel the sting of loneliness. But I know they feel it, too. Momma often writes to me about how she cries over this painful separation from her children.

Oceans lie between us. I turn once more to look at the large hill that stands in my path, and I remember that God tells us that we need to make sacrifices when we serve. Jesus carried his heavy cross outside the city gates to where burnt offerings were made. Why do people suffer? If we follow Jesus, sacrifice is inescapable. And sometimes that sacrifice is our own family.

Martha Claire Truxton
Messiah College
Grantham, Pennsylvania

IF YOU BELONGED *to the world, the world would love you as its own. . . . You do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.*

(John 15:19)

it's hard to be the one chosen
to believe in the dawn that follows the
darkest of nights
to trust in the flame of a single candle
knowing that even the tiniest of lights
eliminates my only hiding place
to follow this pathway to the bend in the road
and beyond
to turn into the wind that blows my mask away
leaving me vulnerable for all the world to see
to speak when no one is listening
to listen when the world is silent
to sing out, even without accompaniment
to rest in the "I love you anyway, no matter what"
to let go and be touched, stretched, molded
to risk laughter, to tempt solitude
to say yes with lips of praise and questions
to mean yes with a mind of strength and
patience
to believe yes with a heart of love and pieces
waiting
to live yes with hands of faith and grace
yes, God, it's hard to be the one chosen
make me yours

j. a. g.
Duke University
Durham, North Carolina

FOR SURELY I KNOW *the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you.*

(Jeremiah 29:11–12)

I used to pencil prayer into my daily planner as if God were another Ph.D. I studied theology and volunteered in my free time, yet I still felt empty inside. In my hurried schedule, I was reaching out to others without taking the time to face the brokenness within me. I realized that I had to confront myself, let go of control of my own life, and, amid joy and struggles, trust in God's plan—not easy for a “type-A” personality. I began to reflect on the Scriptures each morning, and over time I came to understand myself, know Jesus better, and recognize the Holy Spirit working in my life. By making daily plans with God and learning to trust in God's plan for me, I found inner peace.

Gretchen M. Baumgardt
Saint Mary's University of Minnesota
Winona, Minnesota

COME TO ME, *all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

(Matthew 11:28–30)

Leaves

Yesterday's secrets
lie scattered and torn like so
many fallen leaves.
Let them go into the wind,
or gather them for a fire.

Michael R. Guerin
Saint John's University
Jamaica, New York