

Week 1: The Worshipping Community Before God Reflections

1. Which portions of the Scripture do I like to read? Why?

First and foremost, I'm drawn to the Gospels because it is within the pages of the Gospels that I find Jesus in the flesh. His words are written in red letters. There is no greater feeling than sitting at the feet of Jesus, himself, especially when I'm listening to a narration on You Version. I can close my eyes and with my eyes closed the scene is even more real and more vivid.

Second, I love reading the Psalms, especially in the Passion Translation. I'm a musician and I've been told by friends, I'm a psalmist, as well. If true, it explains why I'm so drawn in and captivated by the poetry of the Psalms. The Psalms are prayers and there is a prayer for every circumstance including ones for those times when I simply want to worship God and have nothing to ask of Him. The Psalms give me a way to bless God with all my soul, all my heart, and all my spirit.

Finally, I like best to read Paul's letters to the Churches, as it is in his letters that I find direction, correction, encouragement, strength, hope and courage to stand despite persecution and the trials of life.

2. Have I avoided reading parts of the Psalms in the past?

Well, this question definitely made me think about how I approach the Psalms. I've always loved the Psalms, and now that I have the Passion Translation, I have fallen in love with the Psalms all over, again. The Passion Translation in hand, I have almost read the Psalms straight through. But, typically, I approach the Psalms with an attitude of a "seeking" heart, feathering through the pages, skimming for one verse that speaks to me that moment, and then once I find that one verse, I will read the entire Psalm. I've never thought of this as "avoiding" certain Psalms, but with this question, I realized that there are, indeed, certain verses and probably even whole Psalms I don't read or gloss over at best. Wanting to test this out, I started leafing through the Psalms. Low and behold I stumbles on a verse or two that made me feel uncomfortable. Why, uncomfortable?

Because the Psalmist is praying to God in a manner I would never even think to pray. For example, Psalm 13, "Will you forget me forever? How much longer, Lord? Will you look the other way when I'm in need?" In all my life, I have NEVER even considered the possibility of God having forgotten me, nor would I ever accuse Him of looking the other way. If I'm feeling any separation or distance from God, I know it is because I moved, not Him. Rifling through to another Psalm, I found another verse that I flatly rejected and absolutely have avoided in the past. Why? Because the Psalmist is complaining or accusing God of something that I do not personally KNOW to be His character, at least in my experience. For example, Psalm 74, "Will your anger smolder against us forever?" I realize that in the Old Testament, God did show "anger" towards the people Israel, but I just have never known that part of His character towards me. His love is always greater! I've always struggled to reconcile the character of God in the Old Testament with the character of God in the New Testament.

This morning God gave me a song that captures my heart towards Him and expresses why I could never, would never pray in this manner. The song, "I Know" is from Big Daddy Weave's album, "When the Light Comes". Until this morning, I had never heard this song, but this is how God talks to me when I make time for Him.

You don't answer all my questions, but You hear me when I speak
You don't keep my heart from breakin', but when it does, You weep with me
You're so close that I can feel You when I've lost the words to pray
And though my eyes have never seen You, I've seen enough to say. . .

I know that You are good; I know that You are kind
I know that You are so much more, than what I leave behind
I know that I am loved; I know that I am safe
'Cause even in the fire to live is Christ, to die is gain

I don't understand the sorrow, but You're calm within the storm
Sometimes this weight is overwhelming, but I don't carry it alone
You're still close when I can't feel You; I don't have to be afraid

On my darkest day, from the deepest pain
Through it all, my heart, will choose to sing Your praise

3. Which of the characteristics of our world has caused me the most struggle in my faith walk?

That would have to be self-sufficiency, especially when it comes to accomplishing/DOING things... I half-joke with God about this one. I kid with him often about it being His fault for granting me so much strength and placing in me so many natural talents. I KNOW that it isn't His fault or will, for that matter, that I should do things without Him. It's just that, I so often forget to invite Him to join me. I so easily pick up on new things...show me once, and I've got it AND I can usually figure out a way to do something with more efficiency that will produce better results. I have the gift of an administrator, and I most definitely have a Type A personality. If I'm honest, I prefer working alone because I can become very frustrated with others when they don't see the same things, slow me down, or hold me back.

I think at least in part, this mindset stems from being single my entire adult life. I've had to do everything by myself. I was never blessed with a helpmate. For a long time I grieved this! But, now, I'm actually quite okay with it. I like that it is just me and God; me and Jesus. Jesus has truly become my Bridegroom and my One and only love. Without a husband to help me, I have learned how to change outlets and light switches; I've hung chandeliers and light fixtures by myself. I mow my own lawn and shovel my own snow. I wax and polish my own car. I don't have anyone else offering to help me, so I've learned to do it myself.

Now, at the end of the day, if I've been going at something strong, in auto pilot, I do often collapse after a time, exhausted and not able to enjoy what I've just accomplished. I realize often too late that I've charged ahead on my own and left God out of it. It is okay to be passionate about something and even determined, but NOT driven. When I'm driven, that's when I forget to pray and ask God if He's ok with the timing. I can think of many times when I acted out of God's timing and it has caused great strife, frustration and pain. And, these are the times that bitterness slips in, as well. These are the times that I'm not content with being alone and take out my bitterness on family members who never offer to help me. It takes me a bit to adjust my attitude and get back into a place of peace and contentment in God's love.

In my heart I want to do EVERYTHING for the glory of God and that means I need to pray that He goes with me and before me BEFORE I start doing anything of great significance, and even things that are not so difficult. I honestly don't know how to ask for help from others. I don't know even where to begin. I've asked for help in the past with things that were too big for me, and I've always found that I end up with even more work to do after they leave. (Probably asking the wrong people?) Too often I've ended up disappointed and wishing I had just done "whatever it is" myself. It IS easier for me to trust God than it is others. He has NEVER let me down. I say this, but still I know I leave him behind often.

4. Which of the characteristics of the counter-world of the Psalms, do I need to develop more fully?

In some ways I think I'm still struggling with a "poverty-mindset". I need to start living the more abundant life. I am only now beginning to understand that God has treasures "on earth" that He wants for me to have, not just treasures in Heaven. If there is something I would like to have, even if I sensed the Holy Spirit prompting me to wait, I will usually find a way to justify getting the item when I want it. Even if I end up walking away at first, I will typically make another trip out to the store in a couple days. As a result, I'm sure I've missed out on many blessings. No doubt God would bring some of the things I've purchased to me through better means that would not have involved me spending so much, or maybe He would have placed it on someone else's heart to gift it.

I think much of my struggle with this stems from past disappointments and let downs. I am a giver, and so Christmas is one of my favorite times. I also tend to really "know" people and pay attention to what they care about and the things they like and want. I make sure that everyone has a wonderful Christmas and I put so much thought into the gifts I give. Rarely do I need to ask for help in figuring out what to get for someone. I give from my heart ALWAYS! On the contrary, I don't feel like my family knows me, at all. When it is my turn to open gifts? Let's just say, I'd prefer to have nothing under the tree at all. There was one Christmas, that something happened that really "says it all". My niece had been passing out gifts that year and I had been sitting back enjoying watching everyone open up their gifts, finding joy in their joy! Then everything took a horrible turn. My niece approached me with a gift she had made for me and asked, "Aunt Becky, where is your pile?" I didn't have one! When I did finally get a few little things, not one item

spoke to who I was. Nothing personal, nothing sentimental, nothing even very useful. All things, other than that one homemade item that my niece made for me, ended up going to goodwill just a few days later. This may sound ungrateful, but I think it is just sad. Sad that the very people who are supposed to know me best, do not know me at all. It hurts! This is why I'm quick to make purchases without waiting on God. I have a hard time "seeing" or I guess "believing" He has placed anyone in my life who sees my need or "gets me!" I feel like if I want to do or have something, I must do for myself. I actually thought I was further along and making more progress than I thought, but as I'm writing this with tears flooding my eyes and flowing down my face, I realize I still have a long, long way to go. I'm really good, I think, at storing up treasures in Heaven, but as for treasures on Earth, there is the life I want and then the life I'm actually living, and I'm having a hard time believing that it will ever be mine on this side of Heaven.

5. Identify which values of technology or social media have unknowingly found their way into your life. In what way is the Biblical perspective a corrective for you?

For me it really isn't the values of "social media" as defined in this week's lesson that have found their way into my life, as much as it has been entertainment. I have a few shows that I watch that really "control" my time and I've allowed to dictate where you'll find me on certain nights. Even if I haven't spent time in prayer or in God's Word in days, I will still make time to watch those shows, and my excuse is that I need the down time; I need that time to relax and take my mind off of work or off of the cares of the day. I know in my heart this is contrary to the Biblical perspective. I know that my rest and peace is found in God. I know that I am strongest and filled with the most joy when I dedicate my "down time" to the Lord, spending time in His Word, journaling, worshipping in song, dancing, and just being quiet in His presence. It is when I spend this time with the Lord, that I feel rejuvenated and whole again. When I spend time with Him, my joy is restored. Television programs don't "lift me" in any manner. The only thing they provide is something to talk about with my colleagues who watch the same shows. We talk about these actors as if though they are real people. I get caught up in being so concerned about what is going to happen to Kate and Toby, Randall & Kevin (This is Us) or Frank & Danny (two of my favorites from Blue Bloods) that I forget I should be praying for "real" people who are experiencing "real" needs and going through "real" trials of life. I'm thankful that correction does come! I think one of the "correctives" God has allowed is this time of "stand still" because of Covid. These shows aren't airing, and God has shown me once again, it isn't these shows that I need, and not even the conversations with colleagues! Only in Him will I find fulfillment and joy!

6. Do you find your life tilted more toward monologue or dialogue? What made you draw that conclusion?

As of late, most definitely monologue, but not by choice. I absolutely prefer dialogue! But, even before Covid 19 caused us to retreat into isolation, I was already beginning to feel isolated, cut off from friends. I've always had a few close friends that I talked to on a regular basis and spent time with, and then numerous

friends on the periphery that I only speak with at work or at Church. But, even before Covid, life got in the way.

One friend who I used to speak to for hours on the phone at least once or twice a week, took a little bit different path in life and we've grown a little distant. First, we stopped talking every week, and then instead of calling she would check in with text messages. There never seemed to be enough time to have a meaningful conversation. She, like so many, got taken up with the vice and convenience of social media. Then there were health issues that prevented her from doing the things we used to do together that kept our friendship alive. Finally, just a couple months ago she had a stroke that affected her ability to communicate significantly. So, now, conversations are out of the question and her other health issues prevent interaction.

Another friend that I always dialogue with about everything under the sun, has also grown distant. We used to do things together almost every week and spend time in deep conversations. We frequently talk about how we are "twinning", as we often find ourselves thinking, doing, being on the same page in so many ways. I think we still have this, but again life has interfered. Her work hours are crazy and so different from mine that we either don't have time to get together or we aren't making the time anymore. She is another one who prefers to text message, and I borderline hate texting. I will always prefer hearing my friends' voices! But, when I call her, it is rare that she has a whole lot of time to talk. Another thing that is significantly impacting the time we can spend together is that we both have parents who are aging and who need us to be there for them. Instead of spending weekend time together, we are both spending more time with our parents. So, yes, life is interfering with my friendships and my need for dialogue. I'm in serious need of more friends with a heart for God, so I can dialogue once again.



Lord,

In these last few weeks, you've helped me to see that I still harbor much bitterness and resentment towards those who have hurt me in the past. Some from long ago; others more recently. Help me, Lord, to forgive those who have hurt me, so that I may be released from this pain, never to think upon it

again. Help me to love them in a manner that is pleasing to You, for You have loved me with unconditional love. You have shown me mercy and grace so many times. Your mercies are truly new every morning! Lord, as I strive to be more like You, help me to look only to You for my worth. Help me to see those who have hurt me through Your eyes of love. Help me to see their hurt and help me to minister to them, rather than taking offense. Lord, I lay this bitterness and resentment at Your feet. I release those who have hurt me into your care, and I ask that you forgive me for holding these things against them. Bring them to my remembrance when I am in prayer. Continue to search my heart, Lord, and show

me any unforgiveness that remains. Uproot its hold on my heart, so that there is nothing that would separate me from You. Lord, take me to the cross and let me hear the words of your Son as he prayed for his enemies who nailed him to the cross. Let his words resonate in my heart any time I'm hurt so that bitterness can never again take root. Precious words! Amazing love! "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!"

With all my heart,
Rebekah

Week 2: Psalms for Trouble Free Times

1. Attributes that describe God as I know Him. . .

Love - (Hebrew, "raheb") to have affection;

(Other source) deeply committed and connected to someone; a bond that two people share; (Hebrew, "chashaq") to cling; to delight in; have delight, set in love

Faithful - (Hebrew, "emuwnah") firmness; security; stability, steady, trustworthy, established

Merciful - (Hebrew, "rachem") full of compassion

(Other source) love that responds to human need in an unexpected or unmerited way; at its core, mercy is forgiveness.

(Hebrew, "chesed") steadfast loyalty

Stronghold - (Hebrew, "matsowr") fastness, bulwark, defence, fortress, tower

(Dictionary) A place that has been fortified so as to protect it against attack; a place

where a particular belief is strongly defended or upheld.

Mighty - (Dictionary) Possessing great and impressive power or strength

Psalmist – (Dictionary) Author or Composer of a psalm (song)
(Other source) – conveys things from the heart and mind (of the Lord) to the people in the form of a “song”

2. Things God has done for me. . .

God has healed me and restored my health, (cancer & life-threatening blood clots); He makes His presence known when I’m feeling forgotten or alone (a hazard of being single); He has forgiven me 70x7 for things that I keep doing over and over (He stays with me during every trip around the same mountain – not being a great steward of money; debt); He has surprised me with His love and generous gifts (material possessions like new vehicles when I would have settled for an old one, not once, but twice); He has made it so I have favor before “men” at various times in my life so that He could prosper me and move me into positions I never before imagined; He has advanced me in my career and set me in a place of favor with my boss. He has provided me with a place I can call home; He has given me two beautiful great nieces who remind of the most important things in life and help me experience the joy of my childhood once again; He has spoken a word from His Word to me at just the right time, and He has given me my life’s verse, that carries me through every storm; He has guided me through some pretty tough decisions, especially recently, with regards to investment in my future and the future of my family. He has given me the desires of my heart, especially when my desire is to do something “big” for Him so that He gets all the glory. He has set a pastor over me who I can truly call my shepherd – in all my years in the Church, never have I experienced this. He speaks to me through His Word and opened my eyes to mysteries I never saw before (given me understanding). He has provided me with simple pleasures, as well. He planted me in a home with a father & mother who loved & served Him, so I grew up in the Church and have known Him all my life. He has given me many skills and giftings that have become weapons of my warfare. (With my voice and with singing, I can silence the Enemy!) He has given me a gift of discernment and often has revealed the plans/schemes of others against me. He has protected my character in the face of those who tell lies about me. In those times when I cried out to Him with urgency for protection over a family member, He answered my cry immediately!

A Psalm of Praise

Praise the Lord, oh my soul,
with all that is within me;
Praise the Lord, oh my soul,
and let me not forget all You have done for me!

I praise you, Oh, Lord, for your great love, so undeserved;
A love that has bound me unto yourself,
An unfailing love that knows no limit,
You have set me in Your love, simply because it pleases you,

Oh, Lord my delight is in You!

Praise the Lord, oh my soul,
with all that is within me;
Praise the Lord, oh my soul,
and let me not forget all You have done for me!

I praise you, Oh, Lord, for your faithfulness,
In You I have found rest and peace from the storms of life;
You have always been faithful to set my feet upon firm ground,
You have not allowed me to stumble or fall;
Your faithfulness has stood the test of time,
Time and again you have rescued me from the hands of The Enemy;
You have given me life, when the Enemy tried to take it.
You have held me fast in your hands and have upheld me in times of trouble.

Praise the Lord, oh my soul,
with all that is within me;
Praise the Lord, oh my soul,
and let me not forget all You have done for me!

I praise you, Oh, Lord, for Your mercy and grace follow me,
As I place my trust in You, you have blessed me with good things,
You have given to me unexpected things,
Possessions not sought after, not deserved
But, yet you give without hesitation,
Expecting nothing in return, but that I would give You all the glory!
Indeed, I will joyfully give You all the praise and glory!

For I love to sing your praises, Oh, Lord!
My heart has heard you singing over me in the night watches,
and in the light of the day.
You have placed Your psalms within my heart,
And, I gladly join Your chorus and sing the words back to You.
Praise the Lord, oh my soul,
with all that is within me;
Praise the Lord, oh my soul,
and let me not forget all You have done for me!

I praise you, Oh Lord, for you have set Your watch over me,
You are my strong tower; you are a bulwark never failing;
You have hedged me around with your angels,
and have shielded me from the darts of my enemies;
Their lies fall profitless to the threshing floor,
they are scattered in the wind!
You have covered me with Your wings,
and you have set a shepherd over me,
to guide me and instruct me in your ways;

You have shown me that I am never alone;
You have placed me in a household of faith,
among Brothers and Sisters of the faith,
who will hold my arms up when the battle is long,
and I am so weary that the only prayer I can pray,
is to speak the name, "Jesus!"

So, Yes. . .

Praise the Lord, oh my soul,
with all that is within me;
Praise the Lord, oh my soul,
and let me not forget all You have done for me!



Lord,

As you have done so many times before, I pray that You would heal me of this most recent affliction. It is a hindrance to me serving You as I want. Lord, show me if there is anything I need to do on my part to bring about healing more swiftly. Help me to do whatever it is that You ask me to do.

Help me to patiently wait on You for I know You are faithful to complete what You have started. My healing began some time ago, but I am waiting to see its full manifestation. I trust You to bring me the rest of the way, for Your glory! Lord, I praise You for all the times You have restored me to health before. I remember the love and grace You poured out over me. I remember those times when you brought refreshing to my soul and body. I praise You for the miracles You have performed in my life. I will treasure them always! Lord, I am thankful, too for the scars! As they are reminders of all the times You were with me. . .all the times You saw me through. It is because of these scars that I am reminded of Your power and might. You are mighty to save! And, just as You have healed me before, I know You'll do it again. I speak healing in my body as if it is so!

In Jesus name, AMEN

Week 3: Songs of Wisdom That Invite Us to Make Better Choices

1. What recent patterns of a godly life do you recognize as shaping you into a person of wisdom? What do you think God is accomplishing through this process?

The one pattern of godly living that comes to mind is simply the practice of putting my faith and trust in God in all things. In recent years I've faced some pretty significant challenges and had some pretty formidable mountains to climb. The greatest among these challenges was literally a fight for my life. While I laid in bed in the ICU at Crouse, completely dependent upon others for my care, with so many doubts about what my future would hold, I distinctly heard the Lord ask me if I

trusted Him. I felt like Peter when Jesus asked him, "Do you love me?" God asked me three times if I trusted Him. Each time I answered Him, "Yes!" and then gave an account of all the times I could remember when He had been faithful to answer my prayers, especially petitions for my family, and all the times He had brought me through various trials. But, the third time God asked, "Do you trust me?", He added, "Then you must trust me with your life!" That moment was a huge moment of revelation for me. All this time, I thought that I had placed all my trust in God. But, I realized in that moment that I had been holding back one really BIG thing. . .my life! In that moment I realized the true meaning of "my life is NOT my own! It truly belongs to God, and He can choose what He wants to do with it. In that moment I was so humbled! With tears I repented and acknowledged that my life belonged to Him and I gave Him permission to take my life if that was what He desired. It was a moment of raw and real honesty. I let God know that I did not want to leave this world, that there were too many things I still wanted to do for Him, and too many people, like my Lil'Twinkle Star, Esther, and my Lil'Caterpillar, June, that I wanted to stick around for and watch grow up. Even so, I prayed, "Not my will, but thine own!" That night was the first in two weeks that I slept well, with peace in my heart. As I continued the journey to full recovery and restored health, God showed me how much He loved me, in ways I've never known His love. I gained new understanding about what it means for the Lord to take us "from faith to faith!" I learned how to stand strong against the Enemy. I rose up out of my deathbed a victorious Warrior Bride, and since then God has been teaching me to be an intercessor and prayer warrior in these last days. He has shown me His heart for the World and He is breaking my heart for the people who don't know Him and need Him. He has made me bolder in my faith, and be unashamed to speak the name of Jesus and share Him with others. I have also found myself connecting with other "Warrior Brides" that share the same passion for intercession. To draw me out, God had to allow me to go through temporary suffering, such suffering that I could do nothing but put all my trust in Him.

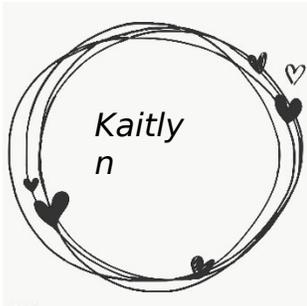
2. Have you come to recognize patterns of thinking or behavior within you that are foolish or unwise?

With regards to behavior that is unwise, I shop when I'm stressed or unhappy. I spend money I shouldn't be spending to buy something to make me feel better about myself. Granted, usually I'm spending money on clothes or items I could use, but often it is not when I should be spending the money. At the end of the month, I cut it very close to not having enough to pay bills, living paycheck to paycheck. What I should be doing when I'm feeling stressed or unhappy is praying, meditating on God's Word, resting in the assurance and peace of God. Often, I justify my spending because even more than buying things for myself, I buy things for others, especially my Lil's! Buying for others gives me much more joy than buying for myself, but it is also leaving me in a very uncomfortable position with debt that has me in chains. Being a good steward of my finances has always been a struggle for me, and I've been around this mountain several times with God. Just recently, I consolidated my debt AGAIN, but this time in a really BIG way! I put everything into a home equity loan, paid off all my credit cards and am having much needed work done on the exterior of my home. With God's help, THIS TIME will be the last time I find myself in this position. I'm different! I've found new strength and

determination. I have new purpose and direction. I'm trying to listen to God and allow Him to move me forward. I don't want to just give Him 10%! I want to place all 100% of my earthly wealth in His hands. I know He has a future plan for my life...one in which I can be a generous giver, sowing into someone else's life who is in need without fear and without any expectation of return. This is my heart's desire, so I'm working on getting my mind in line with my heart.

3. What areas of your lived life would you like to strive to develop further or correct in accordance with the teaching of the wisdom psalms about God's character and will?

I think of Psalm 103:8, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy." I on the other hand am not so slow to anger, not when it comes to the adults in my family or friends, colleagues who continually act in selfish, thoughtless ways and who fail to take responsibility for their actions. I am hardest on family members, adult family members, who I feel should know better. I am very forgiving and willing to overlook offense when my students or nieces do something wrong, but I know if not for God, I would go nuclear on some adults in my life. I strive and long for the day, that no matter what offense or opposition comes against me, I can maintain peace inside of my soul and spirit, so that I have the strength to either say nothing at all or speak only words of love. Even more, I need to learn to pray for those who have hurt me and I need to let God defend me in His time and His way.



Lord,
I lift Kaitlyn before you now and intercede for her. Lord, she has lost her way. Like the prodigal son she has wander far off and she has forgotten whose she is. She is trying to make a way on her own. She is hurting so deeply, looking for answers in all the wrong places and in all the wrong ways. She still looks to others for love, but it isn't love that she has found. Instead she has been used, rejected and betrayed. She has fallen into the Enemy's trap; he has snared her with his lies and empty promises. He is trying to rob her of life. Lord, I miss her laugh! I miss her smile! I miss the joy that once radiated from her. Lord, restore these that the Enemy has stolen. Lord, you are the only One who can bring her back from the precipice. Lord, You have promised that You would not lose one child that has been given into Your Son's hands. I believe You and I'm putting my trust in You that You will not lose Kaitlyn. Lord, come and restore her joy. Draw her to yourself. Cause her to turn her face to You once again. Take her from the hands of the Enemy. Shield her once again under the covering of Your wings. I pray that You would scatter all those who the Enemy is using to cause her harm and blind her to Your love. Lord, turn her eyes from the attractions of this world, and cause her to look once again to You for her joy, her worth, her life and well-being. Lord, heal her heart from the pain of loosing her father and from the feeling

of abandonment. Lord, wrap your arms of love around her and let her know Your presence and sense Your wrap-around love like never before. Let this be the beginning of her return to You.

In prayer, I stand against the Enemy and command him to leave this child alone. I cast him into the fire and stand in Kaitlyn's place. Defend her with Your love, Lord. Let her know that she is not alone. Lord, let her hear Your voice in the night, calling her to return to You. Help her to remember You, her first love! Continue to drive a wedge between her and those who mean her harm and who are calling her away from You. I speak to the serpent who has deceived her with his lies, and command him to be silent! Lord, show her who she is in You. Remind her again of her life's verse, "For I know the plans I have for You, says the Lord. Plans for good, and not for harm, Plans to prosper you, plans for a future and a hope." Lord, help her to remember! Lord, I thank you for your patience and long-suffering. Thank you for keeping Kaitlyn in the palm of Your hand. Thank you for your unfailing love for her. Jesus, please keep Kaitlyn forever before The Father!

Amen and amen